

# Whispers coming back to Cheboygan

By SHAWNA JANKOVIAK  
shawna@cheboygantribune.com

CHEBOYGAN — A tribute show in the style of Gordon Lightfoot's music will again be performed on the Opera House stage on Wednesday, sponsored by Citizens National Bank.

Mackinaw City guitarist Mike Fornes conceived the idea more than two years ago as part of the Opera House's benefit concert series to assemble a band of four backing musicians for a salute to the Canadian balladeer. The group, named *Whispers of the North*, donated two benefit concerts in this style before taking the show on the road, and is now the only full tribute band in North America solely performing Lightfoot's classic folk tunes.

"This show is not only made in Michigan, it began right here in Cheboygan," Fornes said. "We've worked on more authenticity and expanded the set list to include 46 of Gord's songs that we can choose from for a concert. This is music from our culture, our way of life. Obviously, there are lots of romantic ballads and fun songs too among Lightfoot's list of hits, but his music carries a common appreciation among people that crowds seem to enjoy."

Fornes said this show is intended to help the city of Cheboygan by bringing people to the downtown area on an evening that is considered to be post-vacation season, a slow time for most businesses.

"We really want to thank the people for supporting this show," he stated. "We've had an outstanding response from local people who have come out to see us play. We also want to thank Citizens National Bank and the Opera House for their support. Hopefully, with this concert we can give back to the business community."

Wednesday's show is being presented to several out-of-town tour-

ing bus groups in addition to a local audience.

Fornes said his audience will hear Lightfoot's best-known tunes in addition to a variety of others.

"Although we've played here before, we've come a long way in two and a half years," Fornes said. "This will be a new show for Cheboygan."

The play-list includes songs such as "If You Could Read My Mind," "Canadian Railroad Trilogy," "Sundown," "Carefree Highway" and "Rainy Day People." Fornes said "The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald" will also be included.

"I think you have to play those big songs, especially the shipwreck song," Fornes said. "The Fitzgerald sank less than 100 miles from here and anybody who has ever heard that song identifies it with storms they have seen on the lakes and what happened to those guys that horrible night."

Although Fornes has worked in sportscasting and journalism and has authored books about the Mackinac Bridge and the U.S. Coast Guard cutter Mackinaw, his passion for music is a big part of his life. He and his band members have attended several of Lightfoot's shows and have met the band in order to assemble the same instruments, technology and stage settings to replicate Lightfoot's performances.

"Gord and his band have made it clear to us that they approve of our shows," Fornes said. "They are terrific people and have helped us with many details in duplicating their sound. We respect the longevity their music has attained and strive to play it the way they do."

The Whispers of the North band, whose members bring a variety of backgrounds in blues, jazz, rock'n'roll and sacred music, fills the same roles as Lightfoot's own backing musicians. Fornes believes this is essential to performing the sounds of the original recordings.

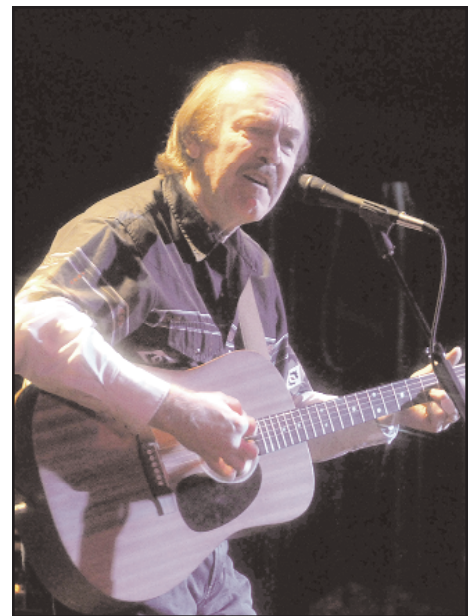
Lead guitarist Todd Golnick plays

the acoustic and electric melody lines, and George Krawczyk on keyboard supplies the orchestral sounds for the 24-song show. Bassist John Riemer and drummer/percussionist Joe Kwiatkowski have charge of the beat and special effects score.

Fornes will sing and play six-string and 12-string guitars, authentic to the models used by Lightfoot on stage. The 90-minute show will be performed "casino style" with no intermission to accommodate several groups of tour bus passengers visiting the area, and for those coming out on a work or school night.

"I think this concert is a good fit for those having a vacation experience, because the music is about all of the things they might have seen while they were here, like the lakes, the ships and the forests," Fornes said. "Hopefully, the music will bring those aspects of their visit to life."

The concert begins at 7:30 p.m. and tickets are available in advance and the night of the show for \$18 each. Contact the Opera House box office by calling 627-5841.



Mike Fornes will play the role of Gordon Lightfoot with his band, Whispers of the North, for "The Gordon Lightfoot Tribute" beginning at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday at the Cheboygan Opera House. Tickets are \$18 and are available now.