

The Saginaw News



Tribute band thrilled to meet Lightfoot

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**COLE WATERMAN
FOR THE SAGINAW NEWS**

After Sunday night's Gordon Lightfoot concert at the Temple Theatre, 201 N. Washington in Saginaw, five fans met the man who inspires their own band

The five members of Whispers of the North, a Lightfoot tribute band hailing from Cheboygan, Cadillac and Mackinaw City, met Lightfoot backstage. During the show, the members occupied seats in the fifth row of the Temple.

"It was a terrific show," said Whispers' singer-guitarist Mike Fornes, 56, a radio announcer for WCBY-AM 1240 in Cheboygan and a staff writer for the Cheboygan Daily Tribune. "He's getting stronger. It was a wonderful, clean acoustic sound. The audience was very enthusiastic, something Gordon commented on."

Fornes estimated Lightfoot played two 50-minute sets for a total of about 25 songs, 90 percent of which Whispers play at their gigs.

When the show ended, Temple Theatre staff led the Whispers band backstage for a 40-minute meeting with Lightfoot and his band.

"Each of his guys met each of our guys," Fornes said. "He was so gracious, really genuinely interested in knowing how we do his show. They were asking us as many questions as we were asking them."

The other members of Whispers agreed the meeting was a great experience.

"Gordon Lightfoot's a legend, and he has real significance as a writer of North American folk music," said Whispers' keyboardist George M. Krawczyk, 54, director of music ministry at St. Mary-St. Charles Catholic Church in Cheboygan. "A lot he has to say in songs resonates with us. I've never met a more gracious group of guys."

"I didn't know anything about Gordon until a few years ago," added Whispers' bassist, John W. Riemer, 65, a retired jazz guitar professor from Kalamazoo College. "It was a new experience."

Whispers of the North formed 2 1/2 years ago, Fornes said, coming together to perform at a benefit concert for the Cheboygan Opera House when it lost some of its state funding.

Fornes said the band tries to recreate its stage show as accurately as possible to Lightfoot's own.

"We're trying to keep his music living on," he said. "He seemed to really appreciate that we're so well received."



