

“The characters these young actors play in ‘The Get Down’ unwittingly become a band of brothers. ... I know they’re collectively on the beginning of a thrilling journey with a big story to tell.”

— Baz Luhrmann, on his upcoming hip-hop drama “The Get Down,” to premiere on Netflix in 2016



Who can he be now?

Colin Hay on Men at Work and inspiration

By Keith Valcourt
SPECIAL TO THE WASHINGTON TIMES

For over two decades, Colin Hay has been turning raw emotion into musical inspiration as the lead singer of quirky '80s Aussie band Men at Work, and then as respected solo singer-songwriter. His music has appeared in TV shows and films such as “Scrubs” and “Garden State.”

Along the way, the Scottish-Australian has released well over a dozen albums of pure pop. His latest, “Next Year People,” showcases a maturity in songwriting about heartbreak and hope.

Mr. Hay reflected on his former band and the music that inspires him.

Question: How did you transition from being “the guy from Men at Work” to a modern-day troubadour?

Answer: I think when I figured out that it was pointless for me to transition at all, because I will always be “the guy from Men at Work.” [I’m] happy to be him. You really can’t get away from it. You might as well just embrace it.

Eventually, people just get it. They say, “Oh, it’s that guy, and he’s doing this now.” If they like it, they come along. If they don’t, they don’t.

Q: Did [multi-instrumentalist] Greg Ham’s death in 2012 signal the end of Men at Work?

A: It ended in 2002. We started touring [again] in 1996, just Greg and I with



“As you get older, mortality is more apparent. There is an inherent nagging feeling that death is unavoidable. You have to make the best of it while you’re here,” Colin Hay of Men at Work fame on the mix of sadness and hope in his music.

three other guys. It wasn’t the original band, [but] we did that for six years.

Greg and I always wanted to try and make a new record, a new Men at Work album. That never happened. After six years, it was becoming a nostalgia act,

which was fun to do on a certain level, but it took up a lot of energy and time.

I dearly loved my friend Greg, but we never did come up with new material. He was struggling. Of course, when he died, it was horrendous. I always thought we

would work together again.

Q: What did the copyright lawsuit over “Down Under” cost?

A: The case, legal fees and such, cost \$4.5 million. In the end, [the plaintiffs] were awarded about \$100,000. They wanted 60 percent of “Down Under,” which was ludicrous. They won, but they actually lost when you look at all the costs. There was enormous loss to do with that case, and the money was the least of it.

Q: A lot of your solo albums are acoustic-based. What is the appeal of the acoustic guitar?

A: I think the impression that I make acoustic records is because I go out and play live acoustically. I love the sound of the acoustic guitar. It sounds natural to me. It is the instrument I started on. I have an affinity [for] the acoustic guitar.

Q: Did you grow up on folk music?

A: I grew up on pop music in my father and mother’s music shop that we had before we went to Australia — all the music of the day, the hits of the day. Whether it was The Beatles or The Kinks or Elvis or Rolling Stones. Petula Clark. [laughs] Then my brother started playing me Wilson Pickett, Otis Redding, Booker T & The MG’s.

Between the ages of 5 and 14, I grew up in this music shop. It was a pretty remarkable childhood.

Q: With over a dozen albums, how do you decide what to play live?

A: I tend to favor the latest record that I’ve done, because it’s always good to play new music. Then I just kind of pick songs that I particularly like from my records. After the first week of the tour, a set list tends to present itself to me, and that is what I end up playing most of the tour.

I always have to play “Overkill” and a

couple Men at Work songs. There was a time, a few years after Men at Work broke up, when I didn’t play them. I think there was some kind of emotional baggage. I’m over that. Those songs were very good to me.

Q: This summer, you’re touring with Barenaked Ladies and Violent Femmes playing outdoor theaters?

A: Yes. That is something I haven’t done in quite a while. I’m looking forward to that. I am the opening act. Just me and an acoustic guitar. I get on there for a half-hour, then get off and let them do their thing. I’ll play a couple hit songs, then I’ll bring it up to the present. I’ll do 35 years in 35 minutes. [laughs]

Q: Why were there four years between your last solo album and “Next Year People”?

A: Because I’m lazy. [laughs] No, I was on the road all the time and was trying to find time to do a record. It didn’t really seem like four years.

As you get older, time seems to go by really quickly. I went out on the road on the last record in 2012 and 2013. All of a sudden, another year had gone by. Finally I said, “OK, I have to get off the road.” I got off in April of last year and just stayed at home in the studio. Even though I’m signed to this label out of Nashville, I’m pretty much a one-man operation. Things take a little bit longer than if I had a team of people. But mainly because I’m lazy.

Q: A lot of your songs seem to blend sadness and hope.

A: I think that is what we all feel a lot of the time, don’t we? As you get older, mortality is more apparent. There is an inherent nagging feeling that death is unavoidable. You have to make the best of it while you’re here.

Get Out

The week’s pocket picks

By Samantha Sault

Festival

National Cherry Blossom Festival Parade and Japanese Street Festival

Spring weather has arrived just in time for the National Cherry Blossom Festival Parade. The parade will cover 10 blocks with helium balloons, floats and performers from across the country celebrating the blossoms and the nation’s friendship with Japan. Participants include law enforcement, dance ensembles, local celebrities, media personalities, military and high school marching bands, politicians, ambassadors and the Washington Redskins cheerleaders. Arrive early and grab a spot on the parade route along Constitution Avenue Northwest or purchase \$20 tickets for grandstand seating near the National Archives. After the parade, take a walk around the Tidal Basin or rent a paddle boat to see the blossoms in peak bloom, or head to Pennsylvania Avenue for the Japanese Street Festival, featuring over 50 food and arts vendors as well as cultural performances. The parade will be from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. Saturday along Constitution Avenue between Seventh and 17th streets Northwest. **Japanese Street Festival Saturday from 10:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. along Pennsylvania Avenue between Ninth and 14th streets Northwest. 877/442-5666. Web: NationalCherryBlossomFestival.org.**



History

The Lincoln Tribute

Wednesday marks the 150th anniversary of President Lincoln’s assassination at Ford’s Theatre. To remember the tragedy and the Lincoln legacy, the venue will host round-the-clock events Tuesday and Wednesday. Beginning at 9 a.m. Tuesday, historians will provide first-person accounts and academic lectures about the end of the Civil War, the timeline of the assassination and Lincoln’s lasting impacts. You also can catch a performance of “One Destiny,” which tells the story of that fateful night through the eyes of one of the actors and the theater’s owner, or a free screening of Steven Spielberg’s 2012 film “Lincoln” at the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery. The highlight will be the candlelight vigil at 10:15 p.m. Tuesday followed by theater tours all night before a wreath-laying ceremony at 7:22 a.m. Wednesday, when Lincoln was officially pronounced dead. Most events require tickets, which can be reserved online or acquired at the theater’s box office beginning at 8:30 a.m. the day of the event. **Tuesday and Wednesday at Ford’s Theatre, 511 10th St. NW. 202/347-4833. Web: Fords.org.**



Dining

Taste of the Nation

A little self-indulgence next week can help a good cause. On Monday, Taste of the Nation will provide an opportunity to try dozens of the area’s hottest restaurants and bars while benefiting local hunger charities. Participants include longtime favorites such as Art & Soul and Westend Bistro and recent arrivals including Mango Tree and The Fainting Goat, as well as mixologists from Buffalo & Bergen, Southern Efficiency and Mockingbird Hill, among others. Tickets start at \$120, but you can purchase VIP tickets for early admittance and meet-and-greets with Food Network celebrities. Taste the Nation benefits the Capital Area Food Bank, DC Hunger Solutions, and Mary’s Center, which supports pregnant women and infants in the need in the region. **Monday at the National Building Museum, 401 F St. NW. 800/969-4767. Web: Strength.org.**



Design

DC Design House

If spring cleaning has you itching to redecorate, you will want to visit the eighth annual DC Design House to get some inspiration from the area’s top interior designers. This year, an 8,869-square-foot country estate in McLean, Virginia, has been transformed into a magnificent dream home by two dozen interior designers, who have decorated the house’s 28 rooms and outdoor spaces with a blend of American farmhouse inspiration and modern amenities. You can get a first look Saturday, where the \$50 preview ticket will include small bites by local celebrity chef Bryan Voltaggio of Volt and Range. The home opens to the public on Sunday. The DC Design House benefits the Children’s National Health System, and the event has raised more than \$1 million for the cause in the past six years. **Through May 10 at 956 Mackall Farms Lane, McLean, Virginia. Web: DCDesignHouse.com.**