

Rock [and Rolling Stone] shrines in Calgary

A TOUR OF SOME LOCAL VENUES AND VINTAGE INSTRUMENTS THAT HAVE BEEN PLAYED BY ROCK LEGENDS.

By Victor Coelho

We all came out to Montreux, on the Lake Geneva shoreline
To make records with a mobile, we didn't have much time...

We ended up at the Grand Hotel, it was empty, cold, and bare.

But with the Rolling Stones truck thing just outside,

We made our music there...

—Deep Purple, "Smoke on the Water"

ON JANUARY 20, 1970 the Rolling Stones proudly announced the completion of a new state-of-the-art mobile recording facility, nicknamed the "Mighty Mobile," but eventually known as simply the Rolling Stones Mobile, or RSM. Fitted with around £100,000 of recording gear installed into a large British Leyland trailer truck (painted khaki "for camouflage," according to Keith Richards), the Mobile was used to record some of the Stones' greatest albums of the 1970s, including parts of *Sticky Fingers* (1971) and virtually all of the brilliant double album *Exile on Main Street* (1972). Like other important studios in popular music such as Chess in Chicago, the Beatles' Abbey Road in London, and Jimi Hendrix's Electric Ladyland studios in New York, to name just a few of the most famous, the Stones' Mobile is an important piece of rock history and was the focal point of the group during what many believe was the most fertile period in their long and durable life. If the Mobile's walls had ears, we would hear the chaos, tensions, debauchery, and, ultimately, creativity of both the Stones' legendary all-night sessions, as well as those by other bands that rented the facility, such as Led Zeppelin and Deep Purple.

Today, the Stones' Mobile, truck and all, is located not among the valuable rock artifacts in Cleveland's Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Museum, but in Calgary as part of the outstanding collection of the Cantos Music Museum (formerly the Chinook Keyboard Centre). It is

just the latest addition to Calgary's rock "shrines," which include venues like the King Edward Hotel and vintage instruments that have been played by some of the most prominent figures in the history of rock.

The evolution of the "rock shrine" – a process that is analogous to how any work of art, music, or literature achieves cultural significance over time – began about 20 years ago as rock was repositioned from its "low-brow" cultural status as a music marketed only to youth, to a product of all-ages, mainstream culture. This is not to say that rock has become completely de-fanged; alternative styles will always swim against the current (or try to, anyway) and provide the tension between old and new that is necessary for the survival of any form of art. But rock has now been validated by established cultural institutions that had once erected firewalls to keep it out. Most universities, from the Ivy League to community colleges, now offer courses and even doctorates in the study of popular music (and some, like the University of Calgary, even have their own blues band-in-residence). Major museums like the Smithsonian in Washington and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts have recently mounted blockbuster exhibitions on the electric guitar, effectively turning the instruments into *objets d'art* – guitar prototypes like Les Paul's famous "Log" or the Fender "Broadcaster" (both from the 1940s) receiving the same recognition once accorded only to a Stradivarius violin. Symphony



photograph courtesy thehighwaystar.com/EMI

Holy smoke! Deep Purple in front of the Rolling Stones' Mobile Recording Studio during the Machine Head recording sessions (above).

orchestras, opera singers, even the famous Kronos Quartet regularly play arrangements of rock music in their programs. Finally, Cleveland's Rock and Roll Hall of Fame provides the most visible evidence of the cultural institutionalization of rock – and of the religious fervour of rock's devotees – in which rock history has been curated and organized historically, complete with "masterpieces" and "relics" in the form of instruments (including shards of broken guitars) and ripped shrouds of clothing used by rock musicians. Rock is clearly a symbol of a new classicism, and the irony of all of this is fascinating. As Mick Jagger remarked to the audience on the occasion of the Rolling Stones' 1989 induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame: "You see us tonight on our best behaviour, but we're being rewarded for 25 years of bad behaviour!"

As millions of tourists enrich themselves culturally each year by visiting the great museums and cathedrals of Europe, thousands of others choose the rock itinerary. They make

their pilgrimages to Graceland or the Mississippi Delta where the blues was born; they weep on the pavement outside the Dakota apartment in New York where John Lennon was assassinated; they find beauty in the squalor of New York's punk manger, CBGB's; or, they venture further to the temples of Liverpool's Cavern Club, the Marquee in London, or Max Yasgur's farm in New York where Woodstock was convened in 1969.

The arrival of the Stones Mobile in Calgary solidifies our position on rock's *via sacra*. Here's a brief tour of some of our own rock shrines.

Blues Power: The King Edward Hotel (438 – 9th Avenue S.E.)

A fixture in Calgary, the long-standing (and hopefully impenetrable) King Edward Hotel is the ideal example of how a musical venue influences the musical life and musical tastes of a city. It is no exaggeration to say that the enormously high calibre of blues, rock, and jazz musicians, as well as the wide diversity of

musical tastes in Calgary, are due in large part to the contribution of the "Eddy," which is the oldest blues club in Canada, even older than the Silver Dollar in Toronto. "We have tremendous local talent here," says Dave Prosser, the Eddy's good-natured GM, who has been booking the room since 1990, "and the best musicians to be found anywhere, like Tim Williams, Bill Dowie, Amos [Garrett], Bill Hills, Don [Johnson] – our clientele expects a high standard." The soul of the Eddy lies in its authentic nature of featuring the top names on the blues circuit in a place that caters to all walks of life. The walls are filled with pictures of some of the most influential players in the blues, some of whom changed the course of popular music history. The first act ever booked into the Eddy was the great Muddy Waters Band, featuring guitarist Bob Margolin and pianist Pinetop Perkins. "It's been tremendous bringing in these legendary acts," says Prosser, whose personal highlight was the appearance at the Eddy of Robert Junior Lockwood, who once played with the most



photography: Sean Dennie

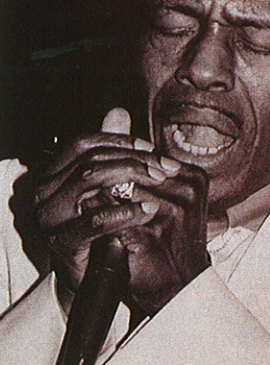
Two Moogs are always better than one. Patrick Moraz's keyboards. (Right, top to bottom) Paul Butterfield, Jeff Healy, Buddy Guy, Clarence Gatemouth Brown, and Junior Wells.

influential bluesman ever, Robert Johnson, and is also related to him. Being a small club, the Eddy offers the chance for the audience to talk to the musicians. Other bookings have included the harp virtuoso Junior Wells, who had to interrupt his booking at the Eddy one night to fly to the Grammys, Luther Johnson, John Hammond, Roosevelt Bukka Barnes, and the famous Buddy Guy, who Prosser remembers as "playing his ass off to a packed house, then walked outside onto the street and continued playing around the block!" Some of the best Canadian acts have included Jeff Healy, Dutch Mason, King Biscuit Boy, and even Bryan Adams.

The hotel is a shrine to the blues in one particularly poignant manner: It was at the Eddy that the great harmonica player Paul Butterfield (1942-87), one of the most outstanding musicians to ever play the blues, played his final gig. Prosser remembers that night and Butterfield's set list: "He played 'Mystery Train' and had Bill Hills' band backing him up.

Butterfield was skeptical about playing with a local band, but it all worked out that night."

The Eddy's faithfulness to the blues carries over into its plans for the future, which is at a true blues crossroads at the moment. The Eddy's new president, Gerry Garvey, a tireless and enthusiastic blues humanist, took over the lease on January 1, 2002, and is attempting to save the Eddy from the wrecking ball by integrating it within the city's East Village plan: "I looked at this from a real estate background since my day job is as a mortgage banker. There are two businesses here, a blues bar, which will not change, and low-income rooms upstairs. With the Salvation Army next door, I thought that we could save the rooms, help these guys out, and get them on their feet." Garvey knows the power of the blues in this equation, which is about hope not depression. "The blues is about everyday living, it's about your mojo, it's about happiness, it's about life." Garvey sees a bright future for the blues at the Eddy: "We want to





photography: Sean Denie

Rock Virtuosos and their Equipment: Keith Emerson's and Patrick Moraz's Synthesizers (Cantos Music Museum, 134 – 11th Avenue S.E.; to view the Cantos Museum collection, phone 261-7790)

In the 1970s, English bands like Deep Purple, Emerson, Lake and Palmer, Yes, and many others successfully integrated the latest in keyboard technology, resulting in a rock style that incorporated classical orchestral effects and synthesized sound. Two of greatest keyboard virtuosos of this period, as well as pioneers of this style, were Keith Emerson of Emerson, Lake, and Palmer, and Patrick Moraz, who replaced Rick Wakeman in the group Yes in 1974. The second floor of the Cantos Music Museum is devoted to modern keyboard instruments and includes two synthesizers owned and played by Emerson and Moraz at the height of their careers. As curator David Keene explains, "Emerson's rig came into being as a result of his desire to have a truly polyphonic synthesizer [so that harmonies and chords could be played, rather than just single notes]," effectively merging the latest in synthesizer technology with the capabilities of a classical organ. The result was "Constellation," a trio of new instruments that included the polyphonic "Apollo." It was used throughout ELP's famous *Brain Salad Surgery* record – listen,

PA system used by Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters on the Magic Bus.

increase the profile of the club to attract the citizens at large of Calgary and to liaise with the University, make videos, and produce a book on the history of the club so people will realize who

has played here. We want this place to be known as the number one blues club in Canada, and there is no reason why this can't happen, given the history of the room."

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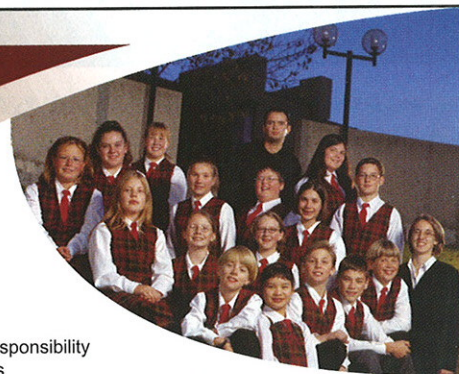
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for example, to the sounds on "Benny the Bouncer" – and tour of 1973. (Next to Emerson's keyboard at the museum is a cover photo from *Creem* magazine showing the exact instrument being played by Emerson.) Nearby is Patrick Moraz's rig (not built by Moog but by Moraz's own technical team), which was used all over Yes's album *Relayer* (1974) and for part of *Yesshows*.

PA System used by Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters on the Magic Bus (Cantos Music Museum, 134 – 11th Avenue S.E., by appointment only)

One of the most curious items of pop culture – and unquestionably one of the most valuable – at the Cantos Music Museum is a small box painted psychedelic green that functioned as the PA system used by the Beat writer Ken Kesey on his famous bus tour across the United States in 1966. As is probably well-known, Kesey, the author of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and his hippie followers called the Merry Pranksters, took a bus trip through the California backwoods while saturated with LSD-laced Kool-Aid, a magic carpet ride that was chronicled in Tom Wolfe's cult classic, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* of 1968 (which includes a description of a mirage seen by the Pranksters while taking

acid at a Beatles concert). This was the event that gave Paul McCartney the inspiration for the Beatles' *Magical Mystery Tour* project. During their trip(s) Kesey wanted all of the conversations recorded and broadcast both inside and outside of the bus, so there could be spontaneous dialogue among the entire crew and with passers-by. The PA in the Cantos Museum is signed by Kesey, and is an evocative symbol, in mint condition, of the influential Haight-Ashbury and hippie culture of the 1960s.

The Rolling Stones' Mobile Studio (Cantos Music Museum, 134 – 11th Avenue S.E.)


The Stones' Mobile came to Calgary in November 2000 and was acquired through the Stones' bassist Bill Wyman. Outfitted with the successful recording technology employed at the famous Olympic Studios in London (where the Stones' *Beggars Banquet* sessions of 1968 were made into a film, *One Plus One*, by Jean-Luc Godard), the Mobile enabled the Stones to record virtually wherever they wanted, and became indispensable when the Stones fled England for the south of France in 1971 as tax exiles. Much of the truck is of the original vintage, while the studio itself has received some upgrades over the years. The 32-track console is original.

The Mobile, still featuring the Stones' famous lapping-tongue logo on the studio doors, was used for almost all of the *Exile on Main Street* sessions, which were held between July and November 1971, in the damp cellar of Keith Richards' rented villa in Villefranche-sur-Mer, not far from Nice. The truck was parked outside the villa, whose frail electrical wiring required the Stones' roadies to tap illegally into the power lines of the nearby French railway station and run heavy cables through the villa's gardens and windows. The warm, unpretentious, creamy sound of *Exile* can be attributed to the Mobile, similar to certain cuts recorded on the RSM from the previous album, *Sticky Fingers*, such as "Sway."

Following *Exile*, the Stones continued using the Mobile to record live performances in Germany and Belgium in 1973, and the 1974 album *It's Only Rock 'n' Roll*. In 1975, the Mobile was used for some of the *Black and Blue* sessions in Rotterdam (some songs of which, like "Slave," were not released until 1981 on *Tattoo You*), for live performances in 1976, and in 1978 for some of the tracks on *Some Girls*, most notably Keith Richards' song "Before They Make Me Run." In 1971-72, Deep Purple rented the studio for a planned live album to be recorded at Montreux, Switzerland. But the theatre burned down the night before during a Frank Zappa concert, and the band, taking a page from *Exile*, recorded what became their finest album, *Machine Head*, in a rented, vacant hotel with the Mobile. Numerous other bands made use of the Mobile, but one group that had a special attraction to its capabilities was Led Zeppelin, who used the studio for some of their most famous tracks recorded between 1971-1972, including "Black Dog," "Over the Hills and Far Away," "Immigrant Song," "The Battle of Evermore," "Tangerine," "Going to California," "Gallows Pole," "Misty Mountain Hop," "Rock and Roll," and "The Rain Song."

According to Andrew Mosker, manager of the Cantos Museum, the Rolling Stones Mobile is currently unavailable for viewing, but plans are underway to evaluate the Mobile's integration into the Museum as an exhibit at a later date.

Victor Coelho is Professor of Music at the University of Calgary, where he teaches courses in Renaissance and in popular music, and has appeared on the Fox Network, the CBC, MTV, and MuchMusic as a commentator on rock music. He is also the lead guitarist of the Rooster Blues band, the blues band-in-residence at the U of C.

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