

## **Gord Atkinson: Ottawa's Oldest Teenager, The Campus Years (1954-1967)**

**by Peter Atkinson, 216 pages, softcover, ISBN 978-1-7779866-0-5, published 2022. \$20C plus postage at [www.showbill.wordpress.com](http://www.showbill.wordpress.com)**

"One of nature's gentlemen," our editor wrote in BING Summer 2021 after the passing of Gord Atkinson, and added: "I shall miss him." Missing from our magazine too have been Gord's respectful words of reflection under *The Crosby Years* heading, a series of articles inspired by his multi-part radio documentary on Bing's career produced in 1975. An Ottawa broadcaster on the entertainment beat for decades, a Canadian fan of Bing's who became an actual friend in the process, Gord returns to us in a book written by his son, Peter.

It is a loving tribute with meticulous research, extensive references, period interviews and newspaper column excerpts plus countless one of a kind photos. We get to share Gord's front row seat just as the rock 'n' roll era began so please be forewarned.

This is not a book with much ado about Bing. "Showbill" (1996) and "The Golden Years of Entertainment" (2016) or "Bing: A Voice For All Seasons" (1984, alongside Sheldon O'Connell), Gord's earlier books, more than rise to meet those expectations. This is not really a book about Gord either. Far more words describe what he fully understood as being most important: pleasing by appreciating his audience of teenaged listeners (and those hanging on a bit longer), and offering his unconditional excitement for the performers who came to town. Gord became a friend to many over the years, a go-to promotional dream contact for sure, so comfortable was his rapport.

From a radio start in Toronto in 1948 and then lured to Ottawa, Gord launched his Dick Clark-like CFRA radio show *Campus Corner* in 1954 (renamed *Campus Club* in 1963). It ended in 1967. This forms the book's subject and basic timeline. Almost any act you can name from the beginning years of rock (and so many others trapped on its periphery) came Gord's way. Take one October night in 1956 as a sample. Chuck Berry, The Platters, The Clovers, Frankie Lymon & The Teenagers were on stage. Add Bill Haley and His Comets. The next year, Gord interviewed then introduced Elvis Presley to concert goers. He would recall many times afterwards: "no one heard a word I said."

We can forgive the audience's impatience for that moment in time because they would stick around and grow in number to anticipate more from Gord later. There were spin-off programs, more concerts, guest appearances at high school dances, cheerleading competitions and bowling tournaments. Popular songs were tracked weekly in his Platter Poll. They were chosen by local listeners exclusively through telephone and written requests often predicting more national trends and bucking any hints of payola.

One chapter is titled Beatlemania – Ottawa Style. Gord played hit after hit record on his program (as did the world from 1964 onwards) but the boys didn't actually play in Ottawa. It took a field trip to Toronto, a four and a half hour drive, for Gord and some radio contest winners to catch their performance in the summer of 1965. One female winner is quoted as saying: " my parents only let me go and my friend's too because it was Gord Atkinson (chaperoning)."

Paul Anka and Rich Little, both Ottawa born entertainers, truly began their careers on *Campus Corner* and like Gord wrote in "Showbill", they are distinct chapters in this book. Peter's words about their interactions with his father convey heart-warming friendships of a lifetime second to none. These pages alone are worth the price of admission for any reader.

Now but briefly, on Bing. There are two mentions. Gord was named "Favourite Canadian Disc Jockey" in 1965 and the award was presented on Ottawa's CJOH TV station. You should be able to guess who called in with congratulations. In 1966, Perry Como came to Ottawa for a concert. Who did Perry consider as being the "dean of popular singing"? (Malcolm's Facebook quizzes are a little tougher.)

Gord's *Campus* program came to an end in 1967 as *Showbill* continued. He also turned 40 and said goodbye to his teenaged years. Still left with lots of things to do.