

## Stan Klees: The Original Canadian Music Man (Part 2)



When we last left Stan Klees he'd been in Toronto radio for several years, but when his father became ill he gave up his radio career and got a job at the post office to help pay medical expenses. But fate soon stepped in.

Stan fell in love with a dancer in the Broadway touring company of *Kiss Me Kate* and because of her ended up spending a lot of time in New York. The frequency of his trips led to a reservations job at TCA (later Air Canada), which came in handy a few years later when CBC TV producer Stan Jacobson was flying Bobby Darin into Toronto for an appearance on *Cross Canada Hit Parade*.

"By this time," Klees remembered, "I was working for ATCO Records and I was at CBC waiting for Bobby Darin to fly in. It was my job to look after him once he got there. Stan (Jacobson) came over to me and said, 'New York's fogged in. Darin's not coming'. I said, 'Give me a minute'. I made a phone call to Air Canada and got my old manager. I told him the problem and he said he'd call me back, which he did. He'd got Darin on the next American Airlines flight into Toronto. I went to the airport to pick him up, got him to CBC and we became good friends. In fact, he stayed in the guest room at my house that night because he couldn't get back to New York. We traveled a lot together over the years, had a lot of fun and I always say that I owe my career to

Bobby Darin, because of all the people he put me in contact with."

Klees and Darin remained friends until Darin's death in 1973.

Another friendship that turned into a successful long-time working relationship was with Walt Grealis.

In 1964, Grealis, a former Toronto police officer, and Klees launched *RPM Weekly* and ran it for the duration of its existence... with a little help from Stan's mother. Klees smiles as he remembers, "My mother was the patron saint of RPM. Whenever we didn't have enough money to pay the post office or the printer, she'd loan us whatever we needed."

Stan and Walt also co-founded the JUNO Awards, which began as the RPM Awards.

"At first," Klees recalls, "we thought we'd just do a poll so we put a ballot in RPM, people filled it out and mailed or faxed it back. As I recall we got about 150 responses, but the winners didn't receive anything.

"Somebody came into the office one day and said, 'It'd be nice if you sent the winners a scroll or something that they could hang on the wall', so I designed one and we sent them out. The following year we decided to throw a party and invited 75 people—and 150 showed up. Within 20 minutes there were no sandwiches left and the bar was finished. Walt read off the winners' names, they came up to pick up their awards and it was over."

At the next year's ceremony, Stan's mother came to the rescue once again and made enough sandwiches to last through the evening's festivities.

The RPM Awards eventually became the JUNO Awards and a few years later the Canadian Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences, an organization set up specifically to handle the Awards, took over control. Stan and Walt stopped going to the JUNOs in 1996 as they were both disappointed at how they were treated.

Stan Klees was a very early supporter of Canadian talent. Long before the CRTC brought in the CanCon regulations, which

Stan fought long and hard for, he was creating Canadian hit records with artists like *Shirley Matthews and Little Caesar and the Consuls* on labels such as Tamarac and Red Leaf. Stan's design of the MAPL logo is still in use today.

At the 2001 SOCAN dinner, where Klees was given a Special Achievement Award, the audience of Canadian musicians, songwriters and publishers gave him a seven-minute standing ovation.

Although Walt Grealis, who died of cancer in 2004, received the Order of Canada in 1994 for his contributions to the Canadian music industry, Stan Klees has not yet been so honoured.

It's time we change that.

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