

‘How far can I take this?’

□ Donny Parenteau to release his latest album in the new year

By Cam Fuller
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Donny Parenteau is already a big fish in a small pond. Now he wants to be a big fish in a big pond. The most decorated musician in Saskatchewan, the Prince Albert-based country artist has a hot new CD in his hand, but he wants to make a big splash with it when it's released in the new year.

The not-yet-titled CD was recorded in Nashville with famous producer Harry Stinson. Stinson is an A-list Music City talent who has worked with everyone from Steve Earle and Elton John to Dolly Parton and Neil Diamond. He co-wrote Martina McBride's *Wild Angels* and produced Corb Lund's Juno-winning album *Hair in My Eyes Like a Hyland Steer*.

Parenteau and his manager (who's worked with The Judds and Terri Clark in the past) were in Toronto this week laying the groundwork for the new album's release.

"How far can I take this?" is the concern of the moment, said Parenteau, a multi-instrumentalist who is self-taught on the fiddle and notable for his mastery of the guitar-mandolin hybrid mandocaster.

Parenteau played a dozen years in Neal McCoy's band before returning to Prince Albert. Back in his home province, he's spend half of his time performing and half attending awards shows; in a one-year span from 2007 to 2008, he received 28 nominations and won 14 awards from various music industry groups.

If Parenteau's experience has taught him one thing, it's that talent alone doesn't guarantee success.

"It's not that you're better," he says. "If you're different, you're what they call marketable. I think I'm different enough."

He remains an independent artist, however, so it's harder getting noticed without the clout of a label behind you.

"You've got to go after a bigger club to get radio to give it a shot."

Hence all the planning prior to the release of the album.

In the meantime, there are a couple of big opportunities to play. Parenteau recently learned that he was chosen to perform at the winter Olympics. The venue is the prestigious Richmond O Zone, capacity 10,000, which will also see sets by Bedouin Soundclash, Wintersleep and Tokyo Police Club over a 17-day span. Parenteau's show is on Feb. 23, Saskatchewan Day.

"The nicest thing about that is that I get to bring my entire band with me. I was totally blown away. I was actually speechless. Figure that one out."

Parenteau's band, incidentally, features Blaine Yandt on bass, Ron Samson on drums, Mike Given on guitar, Grant Sotnikow on piano and Rob Anderson on steel guitar. The sound man is Tony Fitzgerald. The unsung hero is Darcy Jaeger, a friend who volunteered to drive the band's merch and some musical instruments to Vancouver. (They're soliciting business sponsors for the trip).

Parenteau is also looking forward to playing a Batoche gig next summer, especially since the province has proclaimed 2010 to be Year of the Metis. Also next summer, McCoy is playing in Craven, as is Charley Pride. There's a natural synergy, since McCoy used to play with Pride and Parenteau used to play with McCoy. Nothing is official, but it would be cool to hook up, says Parenteau.

"That's three generations of music there."



—Photo

Country artist Donny Parenteau has been chosen to perform at the Olympics