

Proud pushers of all-Canuck rock

By James Muretich

(Herald staff writer)

It all occurred quite subtly. No one was really aware of the secret society known as Friends Of The Beaver, a society dedicated to the promotion of Canadian rock 'n' roll.

One by one, unnoticed by the Americans, Canadian artists began to sneak into the United States' music charts. What was even more surprising was that these acts weren't leaving Beaver Land in search of fame, as other Friends (such as Neil Young and Joni Mitchell) had done.

There was Rush, of course, warbling about interplanetary consciousness to throbbing bass lines. Even April Wine began receiving rave reviews — and they sported the colors of Les Canadiens du Montreal on stage!

Yes, Friends Of The Beaver was making inroads in the home of the brave. By the time Loverboy exploded upon the U.S. of A., it was obvious a full-scale Beaver invasion was under way.

However, despite the rising sales figures, not all the Friends were happy — even if they could now afford video machines and watch endless replays of playoff games between the Maple Leafs and Les Canadiens.

It was noted that recognition was wonderful but what kind of lasting legacy would it leave in the annals of rock 'n' roll? Did rock music in the Great White North want to be remembered by the songs of Triumph?

Well, sooner than you could say Anne Murray can't be here to accept her Juno Award, a crop of new bands

began emerging which sold well but also had some lyrical content. For example, The Payola\$ weren't as big as Loverboy down south but at least the Friends Of The Beaver didn't wince at the group's lyrics.

And the same was true of Red Rider, a Canuck act whose third album — Neruda — is a hot item in the U.S. these days. Calgarians will get a chance to see why for themselves when the group brings its show to the Max Bell Arena on April 30.

Heck, this band combines aggressive Tom Petty-style rhythms and provocative lyrics so smoothly, it almost makes you want to salute the flag!

What's more, the group's leader and songwriter, Tom Cochrane, likes to talk about such things as "audience respect" and "integrity." Praise be, said the Friends, Cochrane was one very ambitious and creative tunesmith.

"I think our song Lunatic Fringe showed that people have an aptitude for things that aren't necessarily in the middle ground," says Cochrane of the tune from the band's second LP which touched on aspects of Mark David Chapman's shooting of John Lennon.

"Rock music starts with the glands; you get people moving, touch them somehow. But if you can infuse what you do with more intelligent themes, then why not? It's just something I feel I have to do.

"It's a cop-out to say, oh, it's just rock music. It's pop art. It's folk music for the masses. Because of radio and television, the music has changed shape. But I honest-

ly feel that we're much the same as the roving minstrels in England three centuries ago singing about the king," says Cochrane.

Unlike some Canadian bands, such as Chilliwack and April Wine, who are content to play it safe in the search of hits, Cochrane keeps trying to explore new areas. He feels the songs on Neruda have come a long way since the group's first hit, White Hot, which he calls "pop music's Raiders Of The Lost Ark."

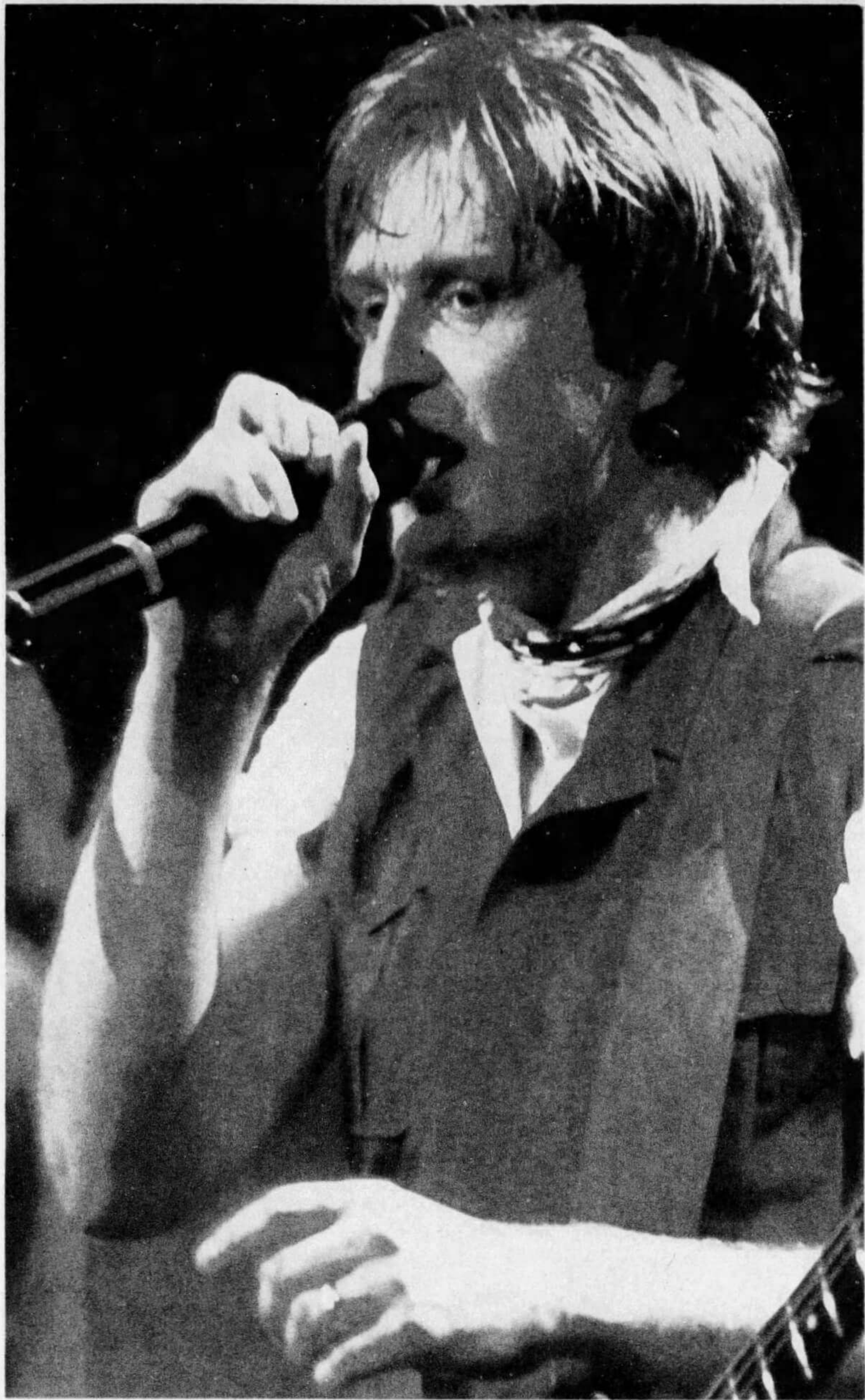
In fact, the title isn't some namby-pamby word pulled out of the air without any thought. It is Cochrane's homage to the Nobel prize-winning poet from Chile, Pablo Neruda, who died in 1973.

"I've been very influenced by his writing. And we needed a metaphor for the record, needed something that solidified the theme of survival of the individual. The album is mostly about the individual rising like a phoenix out of the ashes to overcome life's hardships.

"The songs, in a way, reflect Neruda's writing in that the lyrics bounce back and forth between street imagery and mystical imagery. Besides, I couldn't name the album Cochrane."

Like a true secret member of the Friends Of The Beaver, Cochrane feels Canadian rock music has a definite contribution to make to the world.

"Canada is a necessary link between England and the United States. I think that what's happened is that Europe has swung too far to the left and America is classically conservative at the moment."



Red Rider's Tom Cochrane keeps trying to explore new areas