



# STAY AWHILE WITH CLIFF EDWARDS

By Lorraine Payette

Do you remember the 70s in Canada? – Long hair, bell bottoms, fringed vests, love beads. Young people waiting for a wonderful new world based on peace and love. The airwaves filled with great music, and hits like “Moody Manitoba Morning”, “Fly Little White Dove Fly” and “Stay Awhile” by The Bells had everyone singing along.

*Clockwise: The Bells (Cliff third from right),  
The Bells (source: on-line; Cliff on right,  
white shirt), Cabaret Series (Fiddle, Step and Song)*

**A** founding member of The Bells, Montreal native Cliff Edwards has spent his life around music. He attended Lake of Two Mountains High School in St-Eustache sur le Lac, a town just north west of Montreal, and while there he joined his first band.

“I have been playing music for over 50 years,” he said. “I started in high school with the Strata-Kats, a 4 piece Country Rockabilly band. We became quite popular with the students and played in our high school gymnasium for dances.”

In addition, the band took some work playing at the Hotel St. Eustache on weekends.

“Unfortunately we were asked to stop by our School Principal because we were underage and attracting the teachers on the weekend, who were seen to be drinking by the staff and some students,” said Edwards.



*Cabaret Series (Fiddle, Step and Song), Cliff Edwards (submitted shot), Jammin' in the Islands (Jim Murray and Debra Hetherington-Day)*

Music was definitely in his blood, and by 1969 The Five Bells (soon to become simply The Bells) were recording numbers like "Moody Manitoba Morning". Their biggest hit came in 1971 with "Stay Awhile" which sold more than a million copies.

Even now, The Bells stay in touch, having occasional reunions and playing charity fundraising concerts. Edwards himself, continues to move forward with his music, and keeps very busy with different festivals and shows.

"I was involved originally, as the Marketing and Entertainment Chair of 'Festival of the Islands' and ultimately the Chair of the event," said Edwards. "I have always wanted to give back to my community, remembering how the community took care of me and my children during the most challenging years."

Edwards would like to see tourism season extended into the "shoulder seasons" (i.e., autumn and spring), with a possibility of stretching them into the winter months. To further this, he is involved with several events in Gananoque.

This past year (2014) he started a new festival – "Sculpture Park Folk & Arts Festival". Running in mid-September, it includes folk music, vendors and various children's activities.



Following this in mid-October is "Jammin' in the Islands" – a free event, showcasing talented musicians performing in non-traditional venues. Almost every business or other venue in Gananoque features live music by local musicians playing many different styles from country to rock to folk to almost anything else. You stop in anywhere to hear high quality music and, if you don't like what's playing, simply pick up and go next door or across the street for something completely different.

Finally, to cheer up this winter, there is the "Cabaret Music Series" at the Firehall Theatre.

"I produce, perform in and present a series of 5 shows," said Edwards. Going into its fourth season, this year's cabaret series includes tributes to Classic Country; Fats, Ray and Jerry Lee; Swing, Swing, Swing; and music from The Canadian Songbook, in addition to the Christmas special held this past December (2014).

Cliff Edwards plans to keep bringing great shows to us for many more years to come. After all this time, it's nice to know he can still warm up our cold Canadian winters with music. [LH](#)