

KEN TOBIAS

More than 40 years of writing songs, several of them hits, didn't dull Ken Tobias' passion for music.

Speaking from Saint John, New Brunswick, his hometown where he returned to live in July 2004 after three decades in Toronto, Tobias had excitement in his voice as he talked about his new material. He recited lyrics from some of the tunes in that 2005 interview, mentioning how he was writing more directly, instead of trying to be oblique.

"In the past when I wasn't feeling great I'd write an "up" song ... but if I don't feel great now I write it down," he said with a chuckle. "I'm very happy with the way I'm writing now."

And while his longtime fans still cheered when he played hits such as *Every Bit Of Love*, *Dream # 2* and *I Just Want To Make Music*, he was finding that when he performed fans also embrace the new stuff. He was putting out his first record since 1984 and looking forward to touring with it.

Although Tobias may have had a lower profile since his heyday in the '70s, he was always writing music, including soundtracks, and performing from time to time. But a return to his Maritime roots seemed to energize him. When we first talked to him in the mid '80s, he had written music for a documentary called *Shahira*, a story on Egypt that was shown on CBC-TV's *Man Alive* program. He'd also written, produced and performed a television and radio commercial for Tourism New Brunswick, which won a Cleo Award. Although he had limited his performing in the '80s to a few Toronto gigs, he'd done a lot of production work with singer Dan Clancy and worked a few years earlier with singer Corey Hart producing demos.

But in 2005, he was more front and centre performing. He said he was surprised by how he couldn't walk the streets of Saint John without people warmly welcoming him back. "They say 'glad to have you back, Kenny (they call me Kenny). You're still a Maritimer, man.' I get up (on stage) and thank them. It almost brings tears to my eyes."



Some Ken Tobias songs have been played on the radio more than 100,000 times. Photo: Courtesy of Ken Tobias

An even more tearful song-related event took place in 2003 when Tobias heard that a long-time fan of his was dying of cancer. Apparently the British Columbia man loved playing Tobias' *Dream # 2* over and over until he wore the record out. When the man's sister contacted Tobias with news of the cancer, the singer-songwriter called him up, chatted, and sent a CD with the song on it.

The man listened to it and died shortly afterwards. When the sister contacted Tobias, the singer "sobbed for about 20 minutes. I was part of something, you know. His last two hours on earth were happy because of the song. That's what it's all about."

Not that Tobias' career has been without highlights. He has some 285 songs registered with SOCAN and several of them have been acknowledged as being played on the radio more than 100,000 times. "I've always been one of those airplay people," he said. "I still can't believe how much they play my music. It's a welcome income, and it's kept my name out there."

In the '80s, he talked about how his songs were known for being upbeat but "there are some bands out there that I'm totally against. Telling people that suicide's okay or that blackness is what's happening. I'm totally opposed to that; I'm a warrior of light."

Tobias wrote the hit single *Stay Awhile* for The Bells and became a protégé of sorts of Bill Medley of The Righteous Brothers. Medley had caught Tobias' act in Montreal and was impressed enough to take him to Hollywood. While there, the Canadian singer-songwriter hung out with actor Dack Rambo (later a star in TV's *Dallas*) and helped Paul Peterson of TV's *The Donna Reed Show* with his singing. He also hung out with Phil Everly before launching his successful solo career in Canada. Though his songs get extensive radio airplay across the country, he admitted that critics sometimes seemed to overlook his accomplishments.

"I'm not trying to get something, but it's like I've fallen through the cracks" when people talk of Canadian musicians from that era. But in 2013 Music/Musique New Brunswick (MNB) announced that Tobias would be the recipient of the first Directors' Lifetime Achievement Award from their organization.

Tobias was enjoying performing and writing when we last talked, collaborating with a young singer/songwriter Jessica Rhaye. He described his new material as "funkier" than before but that he's still "a good hook guy; I write good hooks." When he wasn't writing or playing, he had a second career as an artist, selling his paintings in galleries in Toronto and to private collectors.

"THERE ARE SOME
BANDS OUT THERE THAT
I'M TOTALLY AGAINST.
TELLING PEOPLE THAT
SUICIDE'S OKAY OR
THAT BLACKNESS IS
WHAT'S HAPPENING. I'M
TOTALLY OPPOSED TO
THAT; I'M A WARRIOR
OF LIGHT."

- KEN TOBIAS

He admitted that in his early years he was more nervous about performing but that he's now comfortable because of his experience. "I really dig it," and the enthusiasm in his voice is obvious.

Want to know more about what Ken Tobias is up to? Visit his website: www.kentobias.ca