

High Flyer takes off

By **MIKE BELL**
Calgary Sun

One listen and it's not hard to hear Tom Phillips' new album *High Flyer* comes from a low, low place.

It is, after all, what the local artist calls his breakup album, and in the long, true tradition of suds 'n' sobs country music features songs with titles such as *You're Gone but You Ain't Leavin'* and *King of the Broken Heart*.

"When I did these songs I just wrote them specifically from emotion," says Phillips of the mostly solo affair, sans his usual band The Men of Constant Sorrow. "I wasn't thinking of trying to sell a song. I wasn't thinking of if it would be for the band. I was just writing for that sake. But I had the luxury of the time to do it, for one of the first times in my life."

The reason Phillips had the time was that he'd also just ended another long-term relationship — his day-time bookstore job — which left him more time to ponder the first long-term relationship. Of course, because misery loves company, it wasn't long before Phillips was joined by a fellow downtrodden from the musical ranks.

"I thought I haven't had a day job in a long time, I should have something to show for it," he says. "So I was writing a ton and Kit Johnson moved into the same apartment building as me — after just going through a breakup himself — and we just sat around in my living room, drank coffee and played. "We had such a great time with the sound, we thought, 'Hell, we should make an album.'"

That was actually the guiding factor in the recording of *High Flyer* — the sound.

Phillips wanted to keep things sounding comfortable, and to that end he, Johnson and guests Oscar Lopez and Charlie Veilleux recorded it "like a bunch of old buddies sitting around and playing" — quickly (two days), with no headphones, minimal overdubs, and even the chairs from his apartment. One of the most weep 'n'



whiskey cuts is the oddly *Piano Man*-esque *Sinkin' Fast*, which paints the perfect picture of the sad, lonely man's only oasis. "That song just comes from growing up and playing in bars," he says. "And the (crap) that that will cause."

But, for a man who's spent much of his life singing, strumming and stomping for folks where they serve — he does a regular Friday night gig with the Constant Sorrow crew at Ironwood and Saturday at King Henry VIII — *Sinkin' Fast* is not a song about lessons learned. "If you're in a comfortable enough bar it just feels like you're in your living room ... It's why you did it in the first place."

You can check out the release party for *High Flyer* tomorrow and Monday night at Ironwood.

mike.bell@calgarysun.com

The Calgary Sun
March 13, 2004