

# Country bookworm launches new CD

## TOM PHILLIPS HANDLES BOOKS BY DAY AND MUSIC BY NIGHT

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CALGARY HERALD

**T**he world of literature and country music would appear to be a case of "never the twain shall meet." Tom Phillips knows it ain't so. By day, he manages the Chapters bookstore at 9631 Macleod Trail, deep in the heart of the burgeoning 'burbs of Calgary.

However, by night, he puts on a different hat ... a cowboy hat.

That's when Phillips, along with his band the Men of Constant Sorrow, turns into a honky-tonkin' singer entertaining patrons at such downtown haunts as the Night Gallery.

"I often feel like I've got two suits, man, two suits all the time," says Phillips.

"That's probably because a lot of people in the literary world think I'm completely insane to be doing country music ... but I've never drawn a distinction between the two."

A lot of that stems from having a father who loved country and a mother who loved books. Also, Phillips just plain loves language, in all its myriad forms. Which is why he sees no difference between the work of Welsh poet Dylan Thomas and the songs of Texas tunesmith Townes Van Zandt.

He pursues both with equal passion.

Tonight, though, it's a thoroughly country affair as Phillips and the Men of Constant Sorrow launch their new, self-titled CD with a gig at Quincy's.

The disc captures Phillips' love of old-time country, the kind heard back in the days when tears regularly fell in beers and nary a video was seen.

With a little help from his band and friends like singer Jane Hawley (who possesses the most haunting female voice in Canadian country music), it's a solid offering that

ought to please anyone who prefers Merle Haggard to Tim McGraw.

In fact, even people who think they won't cotton to country music just may find there's more

to his disc than first meets the ear.

Phillips, who pens his own material as well as performing country classics, has found that's often the case when he and his Men of Constant Sorrow perform live.

"Some of my favourite gigs that I've played in Calgary have been at the Night Gallery," he says, referring to the nightspot that normally hosts underground rock bands and cutting-edge deejays.

"They don't need to have me there. If anything, they should boo me off the stage but that place, man, we've had gigs where I come off the stage feeling so high and people, a lot younger than me, come up and go: 'You know, I really hate country music, but I like you guys.'

"I think that comes from the fact that our brand of country is pretty traditional. There's nothing radically new ... but it's a chance to hear real country music," says Phillips.

"It's got roots. And that's the kind of music I like.

"I don't care what kind of music it is, I'm always there for it ... jazz, rock 'n' roll ... as long as it shows its roots."

And Tom Phillips' roots are always showing, whether he's sporting his Stetson or not.

### SPOTLIGHT

■ Tom Phillips and the Men of Constant Sorrow host a CD release party for their new, self-titled disc tonight at Quincy's, 609 7th Ave. S.W. Tickets, \$10, at the door or in advance at TicketMaster.



Handout  
Tom Phillips lets loose with some honky-tonk.