

going on. I've got more respect for him, I think, than anybody I know in the business. He's just a together cat, great guy to talk to, funny. . . ."

Lightfoot laughed, sloshing his Bloody Mary. "I'll tell you a story about Ian," he said.

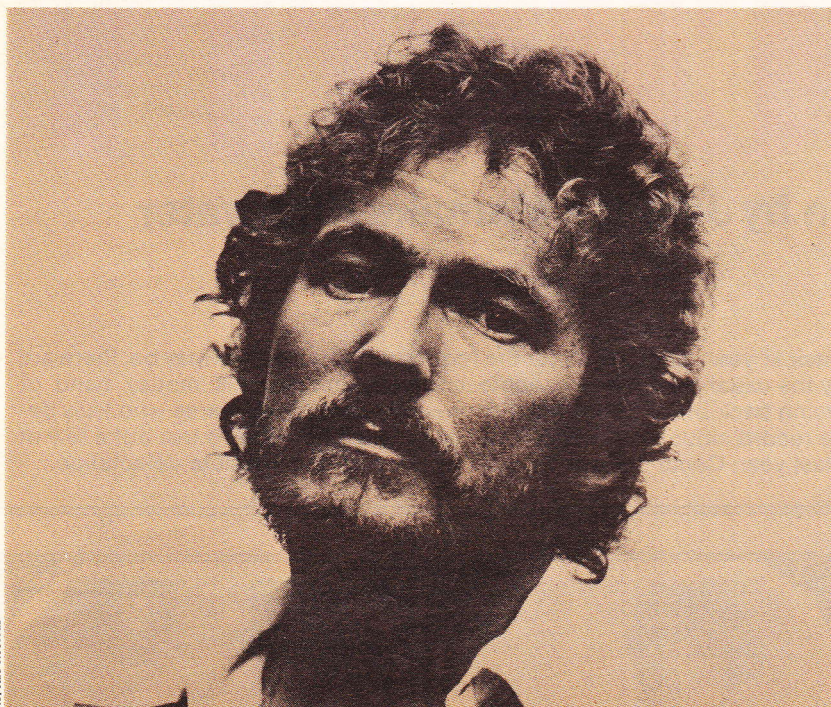
"He went on the Peace Train—you remember that train they had?—and they came into Calgary during the Stampede, and a bunch of rednecks got after him and two or three other

tune when you're changing capo positions around and everything. There are songs that lose their charm if you record them. After you heard one about twice, you'd have to go over and lift up the needle. That song *Partners* that we do is a nice song I wouldn't record."

Talking business, Lightfoot *really* reminded me of a Midwest shopkeeper of the Fifties. Something in the way he squinted made me notice that,

my entire accumulation of cash flow four or five years ago to buy out that catalog, and they wouldn't sell it for half a million dollars. That's what I offered."

But another interruption for evening's-activities coordination, another Bloody Mary, and another behind-the-breath laugh got him to looking younger again. "I'm getting an awful reputation as a drinker," he said. "Don't know why—couldn't be the



**"Ian Tyson . . . gave me my start . . . he's a very respected artist in Canada and a rancher and a really smart, intelligent guy. . . . You ought to see him handle those horses of his."**

longhairs in a car. These guys started playing games with them, hitting the bumpers and such stuff and threatening them. They all got out of the cars in front of a hotel there, and Ian just cold-cocked one of those guys. No words said. Just stepped out and flattened him, and that was the end of the games. Ian is tough. You ought to see him handle those horses he has."

Lightfoot has, one could fairly say, become a much more skillful songwriter than Tyson has—or than most anyone else has—and that's been largely the difference. Or *perhaps* it has, anyway; Lightfoot seems also to have learned numerous other little things about his line of work that could amount to something.

"There are some songs," he said, for example, "that can be done on stage and shouldn't be recorded, and there are some you can record but can't do well on stage. I like that topical song, *Circle of Steel*, but we don't do it because it's so hard to get it in

while he *had* been looking much younger than thirty-five in his cowboy shirt with the sleeves torn off and his Levis and Indian jewelry and long, slightly curly blonde hair and short beard, he suddenly seemed crinkly and leathery and looked maybe a little *older* than that. And it registered in my mind that, all the time I'd been here, he'd been wearing rimless but, well, *chic* spectacles.

He said: "I feel I'm very fortunate when I take a look around at how things are going. I'm in a business that, to a degree, *thrives* in a time like this." And he said: "I've got several songs I'd dearly love to record again, and I could. My five-year clause is up with United Artists. Except they keep coming out with that old stuff. Every time we get a hit single or do anything, United Artists comes out with another album. I'll bet they've put *Early Morning Rain* out six times under different covers. You know, I tried to buy—I was ready to give up

drinking. Actually, alcohol makes you lethargic. But, nevertheless, as long as you get down to it when it comes time to do your job."

And Lightfoot still sees his job as he did before the advent of *It*, the thunderous success of *Sundown*: "Just to refine what I'm doing, to expand my repertoire. The songs can still be sung better—some nights we just sing the balls off that *Canadian Railroad Trilogy*. A really good song will just last, and it can always be improved upon."

Corny as this may sound—corny as the Midwest in the Fifties, certainly—it's the savvy and pragmatism of an old pro that marks Lightfoot. These are supposed to be anachronistic qualities, and even in their so-called heyday they were never spectacular, just inexorable. To find out if they still are, I think one need only observe how long some of Lightfoot's songs last. And, I think, one should live so long.