

A tragic but sweet final moment

By Sarah Sobanski

There's nothing quite like going to a live show. The energy of the crowd, the being close to your idols ? the gratification of knowing it isn't just you who listens to that band ? all of it comes together to create a feeling you really can't get anywhere else.

Last Saturday night, that same feeling came was available in a crowded parking lot in Bancroft ? and it was awesome.

Under a clear sky, before a pale 120-inch projector screen, over a hundred people gathered to watch Gord Downie's last performance with the Tragically Hip. Their roar for 50 Mission Cap? drowned out the thousands in Kingston, Ont. It was an emotional rollercoaster, to call an oven a toaster.

First, there was Downie's wardrobe. Canadian designer Izzy Camilleri collaborated with Downie to create an eccentric assortment of metallic suits for the show, after which Downie threw in a class-act Jaws T-shirt from his own collection. Camilleri said in an interview with *Canadian Business* that Downie wanted to uplift the crowd. When that T-shirt was revealed behind a glinting, silver jacket, you couldn't help but smile.

Each song was played like it was meant to, as hard and as effortless as only a band that has been playing together for over 30 years can accomplish. The dirty grit that the Hip gives to folk-style lyrics is enough to make any maple-syrup junkie swoon, but the way the Hip played Saturday night was something entirely its own.

I saw the Hip in Bobcaygeon ? which shut down its main street for the CBC broadcast from Kingston last weekend ? and there was no comparison to the heart that was put into Kingston's show. In a truly Hip and Canadian fashion, Downie let the music take him for the Bobcaygeon show. He swayed and laughed and played in a relaxed and true to fashion rambling-man kind of way. He was intangible in Bobcaygeon, but in Kingston, he was ever present. Maybe it was just Downie, or maybe it was the energy that came from the entire nation stopping to zero in on a single moment, but everyone felt it.

There's a lot of speculation as to why Downie didn't speak to the audience. Besides his throw to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, a man Downie suggested will be responsible for tying the country back together, Downie could only mouth words to the audience. He expressed himself instead with tears, and rage, and the full spectrum of emotions that must come from facing death and choosing to go out with a bang.

At one point Downie screamed. While performing ?Grace, Too,? Downie submitted to his trembling lower lip, crossing his arms over his chest in a moment that seemed so unfair. He yelled into the microphone as the song goes, but it was raw, powerful. There wasn't a dry eye in the house.

The concert went from 8:30 p.m. to 11:17 p.m. and ran commercial free for its entirety. People danced, sang to the edge of worship, laughed, cried and supported one of their heroes. Even the Olympians down in Rio took time to watch the last Hip concert. The band took notice. They returned for no less than three encores.

The Tragically Hip had no significant success outside of Canada. Many of us northerners believe that it was because they refused to sell out. They remained true to their home and that made it even more personal.

Saturday night was one for the ages. It will go down in history as one of the greatest nights in Canadian music history.