Canadian singing stars preserve wealth

By Michael Lawson

Gordon Lightfoot
Scrapped project

Anne Murray
Basic tastes

Burton Cummings
Millionaire at 20

Incidents like these are the meat and potatoes of gossip columns but they offer a starvation diet to gossip mongers in this country. Canada's most successful entertainers do not play by their rules.

"Isn't it generally understood that the showbiz wealthy - particularly the youth-oriented sector - are foolishly flamboyant with finances, indulging every expensive whim?"

In the United States the gossip press is full of juicy tidbits about a raven-haired vamp who spends bundles on manicures and has added a lake to the swimming pool and two tennis courts in his garden; about a member of a popular vocal group who owns five Rolls Royces before his 21st birthday - and demolishes them because he was much older.

The truth is, Canada's music elite is dull. Those who have made millions are few in number - seem to live sensibly. Rarely does an item emerge such as the one about Cummings' elusive royalty cheque, which he found under his bed.

"The way it works with so many bands that do become financially successful is that for a period of three or four years there's a great deal of income generated. After that period it's like a company going out of business. So while you're making it, you tend to go for a little more.""}

In truth, a band often loses money touring. But the roadwork generates both interest and identity which, in turn, sell records.

He conceded that he and fellow big-timers may have cars, houses and other possessions that are more luxurious than the norm, but defended it by saying:

"The estate, some of it in hometown Ottawa.

Cummings, too, has invested much of his earnings wisely. In the late '60s, when he and the Guess Who were riding high internationally, the Winnipeg rock group had joint holdings in everything from chicken franchises to shopping plazas.

Cummings, now a successful solo artist, is still drawing royalties from the Guess Who years, having co-written most of the band's material with Randy Bachman.

Among his possessions are two fine homes, one overlooking a canyon in Hollywood, the other a 21-room mansion in Winnipeg. And, although he still rents his trademark white Steinway grand piano, he owns a number of other instruments, including an upright piano, guitars, saxophones, flutes and "my expensive toys" - several synthesizers.

Anne Murray's situation is somewhat unusual in that her considerable wealth has come mainly through her talent as a performer - she doesn't write music. But like Anka, Murray today is much in demand worldwide. Leonard Rambeau, president of her Balmer management and publish-
Guitarist Lifeson noted in an interview that people generally have a misguided image of rock musicians. The life — especially the roadwork — is far from glamorous, and the financial rewards are neither plentiful nor easily won.

"A great deal of touring throughout the year is necessary if a band is to get any kind of name at all, and that's an expensive proposition. We have close to 30 people on the road with us so there's a lot of dollars involved."

Although Rush has been a mainstay of Canadian music almost from its beginning, Lifeson said it took four or five years of hard work before the group could pay off the bills for its equipment.

Break even

"It wasn't really until this last tour (of European and American cities) that we sort of broke even and managed to put away a little bit to cover these two months that we're off the road."

The people who benefit most from these sales are the songwriters, whose credit on a single hit tune will net them a small fortune in royalties. Both Paul Anka and Cammings were millionaires by age 20, thanks to their frequently played compositions.

Anka, in fact, still earns between $20,000 and $30,000 a year just for his Tonight Show theme, which has heralded Johnny Carson's entrance for the last 15 years.

But the bulk of his millions comes from the dozens of hit tunes that he recorded himself over a 23-year career, and the ones he tailored exclusively for such artists as Frank Sinatra (My Way) and Tom Jones (She's a Lady).

With the respect he has earned in the music industry, Anka can command top dollars in Las Vegas, where he has one of three residences. And many of those dollars are sensibly invested in real...