

FULL COMMENT

TRENDING [Sydney](#) | [Peshawar](#) | [Torture](#) | [Beliveau](#) | [Maguire](#) | [Ghomeshi](#) | [NHL](#) | [Cosby](#)

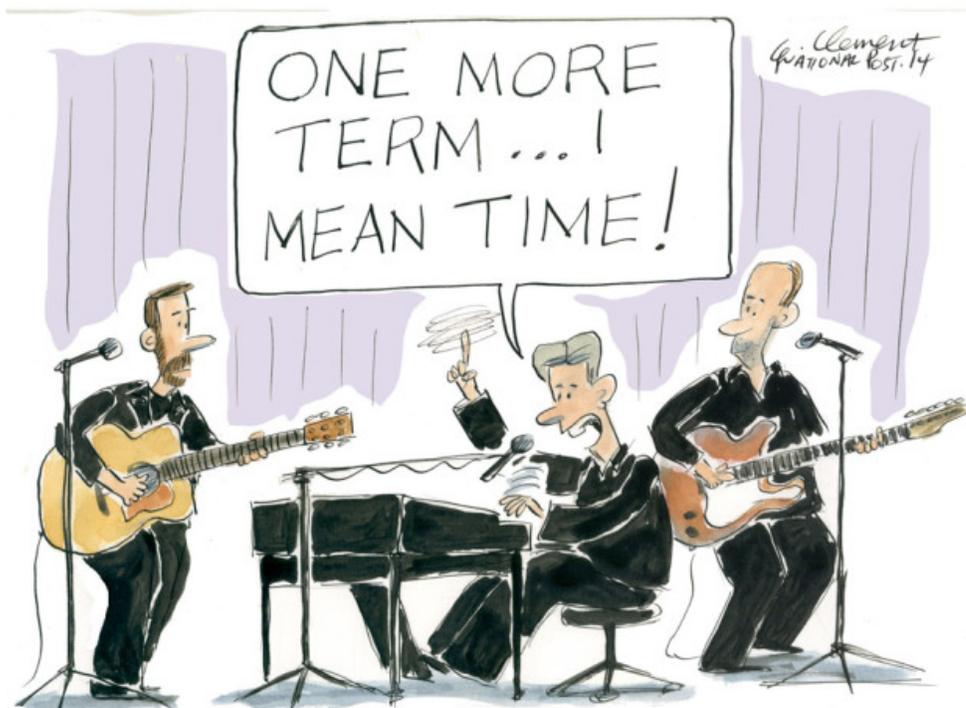
John Ivison: Harper may be a sweet child o' politics, but music appears to be his one distraction



JOHN IVISON | December 10, 2014 | Last Updated: Dec 10 11:44 PM ET

[More from John Ivison](#)

[Republish](#)
[Reprint](#)



Gary Clement/National Post

I'm a survivor of playing in bands around the Glasgow bar circuit, where if they liked you, they let you live.

Stephen Harper didn't face nearly such a tough crowd Tuesday night, when he and his new band, Van Cats, played at the Conservative Party yuletide bash. Since the Prime Minister could fire everyone in the crowd, it was no surprise when he got a standing ovation.

But this rocking and rolling has become quite a thing since the PM first tickled the ivories in public with Yo-Yo Ma in October 2009 at the National Arts Centre.

Mr. Harper has done for musical politicians what the Sound of Music did for singing nuns.

The sense is that this is no longer just a hobby, but has become the cornerstone of how the Prime Minister is being sold to the voting public.

The polling must indicate the audience is growing tired of classic rock staples that have graced previous shows — the Guess Who, Rolling Stones and The Who.

The Beatles were represented this time, but there was also a more eclectic mix of contemporary songs — Ah Mary by Vermont rockers Grace Potter and the Nocturnals and Wagon Wheel by a

PM plays it safe with musical repertoire

Stephen Harper is among Canada's longest-serving Prime Ministers, but also among the most mysterious.

Even after nine years, Canadians have almost no idea of his dreams, fears or appetites — aside from his

Nashville-based bluegrass band, Old Crow Medicine Show.

Appropriately from a man dressed all in black, there was a Johnny Cash tune, Jackson, to satisfy the country crowd out West. The evangelical base would have been satisfied with a rendition of Silent Night – while the francophones would have appreciated him singing a verse or two in French.

The crowd of Tory staffers graciously awarded their boss a standing ovation, which prompted a possibly ill-advised attempt at Guns N’ Roses’ Sweet Child O’ Mine.

Still, the Prime Minister should be commended.

He may not be the best singer in the world. He may not even be the best singer in the band. But he was sweating spinal fluid up there.

He gives us so little of himself in the normal course of events, aware that the emotional vocabulary available to political leaders is so limited it transforms them into one-dimensional caricatures.

But this is an opportunity for him to show a more rounded version of himself. On stage, he came off as natural and unaffected; perhaps it’s when he’s off stage that he’s acting.

We all shape and select evidence according to our own convictions and prejudices. The image of Mr. Harper as the malign Prince of Darkness is somewhat harder to maintain when you watch him singing Take Me Home, Country Roads.

Stephen Harper is many of the things his critics claim for him – a disciplined, occasionally ruthless, goal-oriented politician, motivated by power.

peculiar penchant for constantly appearing in miniature rock concerts. On Tuesday night, Mr. Harper appeared in his sixth such performance at the Conservative Party’s annual holiday bash.

Accordingly, in an attempt to crack the psyche of Canada’s most guarded leader, the *National Post* has meticulously catalogued every song publicly performed by Mr. Harper.

[Continue reading...](#)



But music appears to be his one distraction. “It’s his main relief from thinking constantly about the day to day grind. It’s the one place he can go and the world’s worries fall away,” said former adviser Bruce Carson, who remembers watching him play a Beatles medley on the piano at Harrington Lake during the 2008 election campaign.

Besides being a source of stress relief, it must also work for him politically or his trusty aides wouldn’t have allowed the media to sully their party. Cameras were permitted to film the performance before being booted summarily to the kerb.

Pollster Nik Nanos said seeing the Prime Minister in a more relaxed setting can be very motivating for core voters, even if it doesn’t get people to switch allegiances. “As part of a strategy leading up to an election, firming up and consolidating the core is critical to success,” he said.

None of that is very rock and roll – the Prime Minister is the Pat Boone of hellraisers; as dangerous as a garter snake.

But people want to know their leaders and these performances part the curtain, if only for a moment.

Perhaps he should take the show on the road to places where he’s not the entertainment and the employer. Just as the Beatles honed

their performance skills in the hardscrabble bars of Hamburg, I'd recommend Nice N Sleazy on Glasgow's Sauchiehall Street. Take your own chicken wire.

National Post



Prime Minister Stephen Harper finds a moment during a break in caucus to play a piano at the back of the room Dec. 10, 2008. Jason Ransom/PMO/Handout



Find National Post on Facebook

Most Popular



John Ivison: Spoiled brat Ontario cries for more despite...



Andrew Coyne: A minority government looks possible in 2015, ...



Follow "National Post | Full Comment"

Get every new post delivered to your Inbox.

Join 1,064 other followers

Enter your email address

Sign me up

Build a website with WordPress.com



Canada's new prostitution law lained with toys...

The Beatles

Topics: Full Comment, Canadian Politics, Johnny Cash,

Comments for this thread are now closed.

ALSO ON NATIONAL POST

Rare look inside secretive family court rev... 48 comments

Vancouver's referendum on gridlock shoul... 1 comment

WHAT'S THIS?

w Coyne: A minority government looks possible in 2015, ... mments

ison: Spoiled brat Ontario cries for more despite \$20.5B in comments

962 Comments

National Post

Login

Sort by Best

Share Favorite



[absinthe spoon](#) · 6 days ago

There should have film the crowd people crying in pain and getting drunk not to remember this

107 ^ | v · Share >



[Llewellen](#) → [absinthe spoon](#) · 6 days ago

It must have been painful. If you're not seen to be clapping and shouting enthusiastically, you're on the enemy list. Achtung!!

47 ^ | v · Share >



[Paul Larsen](#) → [Llewellen](#) · 6 days ago

Its probably all the Con Bots programmed to clap and pretend your having a good time.

11 ^ | v · Share >



[Johny B GoodToGo](#) → [Llewellen](#) · 6 days ago

I have to wonder if the musicians are all in the musicians union?

9 ^ | v · Share >



[Oh no Mr. Bill!](#) → [Johny B GoodToGo](#) · 6 days ago

PMSH may need his musical skills for his next job...

after "being booted summarily to the kerb",

October 19, 2015.

12 ^ | v · Share >



[gronky](#) → [Oh no Mr. Bill!](#) · 5 days ago

It is impressive that the people who hate him most seem to have the most invested in everything he does, I voted for him and i couldn't care less about his musical act. No more than i care that JT was a drama teacher, but then, i'm a reasonable person.

17 ^ | v · Share >



[Pedro Eats Potatoes](#) → [gronky](#) · 5 days ago

Like the wife of an incurable drunk, they're co-dependent.

1 ^ | v · Share >



[HankMoody2014](#) → [gronky](#) · 4 days ago

JT plays the skin the flute...

^ | v · Share >



[Pedro Eats Potatoes](#) → [Johny B GoodToGo](#) · 5 days ago

Jake: My name is Jacob Stein. I'm from the American Federation of Music. I've been sent to see if you gentlemen are carrying your permits.

Tucker McElroy: Our what?

Jake: Your union cards. May I see your cards please.

Tucker McElroy: Well, suppose we ain't got no union cards and go in there and start playin' anyway? Whatcha gonna do about that? You gonna stop us, Stein? Ha. You're gonna look pretty funny tryin' to eat corn on the cob with no f__kin' teeth.

1 ^ | v · Share >



[Stephen Hay](#) → [Llewellen](#) · 5 days ago

Oh please, what a childish rant!

1 ^ | v · Share >



[hunter2460](#) → [absinthe spoon](#) · 6 days ago

...there isn't enough tequila in Guadalajara spoon.

15 ^ | v · Share >



[absinthe spoon](#) → [hunter2460](#) · 6 days ago

 hummmmm tequila a nice bucket of fresh margarita hummm bar keep where that drink
11 ^ | v • Share >

 [hunter2460](#) → [absinthe spoon](#) • 6 days ago
A buddy of mine just brought back a "Janitor in a Drum" size bottle of Patron from Cabo...ho ho ho
1 ^ | v • Share >

 [absinthe spoon](#) → [hunter2460](#) • 6 days ago
hehehheheh party
2 ^ | v • Share >

 [absinthe spoon](#) → [hunter2460](#) • 6 days ago
Well change brand then if you must dr pepper and cheap bourbon beefeater gin if you must as long as your drunk
16 ^ | v • Share >

 [hunter2460](#) → [absinthe spoon](#) • 6 days ago
yeah,but i meant not enough grog to forget
1 ^ | v • Share >

 [absinthe spoon](#) → [hunter2460](#) • 6 days ago
Death by alcohol can be a solution like tom wait said i prefer a bottle in front of me then a frontal lobotomy
2 ^ | v • Share >

 [LewisDodgson](#) → [absinthe spoon](#) • 6 days ago
Haters gonna hate. Good for him for getting up there and sharing with people something he loves to do, it takes a lot of guts especially with so many people with HDS out there.
27 ^ | v • Share >

 [absinthe spoon](#) → [LewisDodgson](#) • 6 days ago
well he sounded like a trash can period
30 ^ | v • Share >

 [Bob in DDO](#) → [LewisDodgson](#) • 5 days ago
now let's see him play his beloved hockey-on skates.
5 ^ | v • Share >

 [Polemical](#) → [LewisDodgson](#) • 6 days ago
And loafers gonna loaf. So how long are the 'bonus holidays' that don't count as holidays gonna last for the government sector this year? Is it two or three weeks this time around?
5 ^ | v • Share >

 [accidentalcontrarian](#) → [absinthe spoon](#) • 6 days ago
Hmm, only 16 sock-puppet guests this time - surely you are not starting to show restraint! Can we expect another 16 over the next hour?
6 ^ | v • Share >

 [absinthe spoon](#) → [accidentalcontrarian](#) • 6 days ago
I will say this prove that i guest vote myself then will talkor wait just go fok yourself with a blender
10 ^ | v • Share >

 [tundratreker](#) → [absinthe spoon](#) • 5 days ago
Compared to other posters here, a disproportionately large number of your up-voters are "guests". That statistical evidence may not "prove" you guest-vote yourself -- but, it certainly supports that charge.
^ | v • Share >

 [bklsz#flp](#) → [absinthe spoon](#) • 6 days ago
Perhaps he could have invited Justin to do a little tap dance routine in concert.
6 ^ | v • Share >

 **absinthe spoon** → bklsz#flp · 6 days ago
I said getting drunk i did not say suicidal
16 ^ | v · Share >

 **Oh no Mr. Bill!** → absinthe spoon · 6 days ago
Man in Black

*Well, you wonder why I always dress in black
Why you never see bright colors on my back
And why does my appearance seem to have a somber tone
Well, there's a reason for the things that I have on*

*I wear the black for the poor and the beaten down
Livin' in the hopeless, hungry side of town
I wear it for the prisoner who is long paid for his crime
But is there because he's a victim of the times.*

Johnny Cash
11 ^ | v · Share >

 **Bob in DDO** → Oh no Mr. Bill! · 5 days ago
with his make up and hairdo, we're lucky it wasn't a little black dress and singing Dusty Springfield tunes.
7 ^ | v · Share >

 **Bob in DDO** → bklsz#flp · 5 days ago
he has Skippy and Colandra for that.
3 ^ | v · Share >

 **Dominion_Lad** → bklsz#flp · 5 days ago
Bieber?
1 ^ | v · Share >

 **cancon** → absinthe spoon · 5 days ago
I'm passing this on because it worked for me today. A Dr. on TV said to have inner peace free from pain, we should always finish things we start & we all could use more calm in our lives.

I looked around my house to find things I'd started & hadn't finished, so I finished off a bottle of Merlot, a bottle of Chardonnay, a bottle of Baileys, a bottle of wum, the remainder of Valiumun scriptins, and a box of chocletz.

Yu haf no idr how FABLUS I feel rite now. Sned this to all who need inner p i s s. An telum u luvum.
^ | v · Share >

 This comment was deleted.

 **Badriya** → Festus Haggen · 6 days ago
Lol. Though I think "Sweet little sixteen" is more accurate.
10 ^ | v · Share >

 **Always thinking** → Festus Haggen · 6 days ago
Pathetic far reach
^ | v · Share >

 **Festus Haggen** · 6 days ago
That's the most uncomfortable looking crowd at any Christmas party that I've ever seen.
29 ^ | v · Share >

 **Mike** → Festus Haggen · 6 days ago
Which part? where they're all smiling, clapping or a bunch are dancing?
8 ^ | v · Share >



Festus Haggen → Mike · 6 days ago

It all looks feigned, like they're living in some weird North Korea where their dear leader is performing and they all know if they don't behave accordingly that they'll all disappear....

Oh wait, never mind - mystery solved.

15 ^ | v · Share ›



Always thinking → Festus Haggen · 6 days ago

Lol...feigned

3 ^ | v · Share ›



RenaldoXL5 → Festus Haggen · 6 days ago

Buncha stiffs clapping and barking like trained seals.

Pretty sad.

21 ^ | v · Share ›



Dave → RenaldoXL5 · 6 days ago

"And now, you WILL ALL clap for Dear Leader!"

14 ^ | v · Share ›



This comment was deleted.



Rodimus Prime → GrumpyOldeMan · 6 days ago

Right beside you.

19 ^ | v · Share ›



RZA79 → GrumpyOldeMan · 6 days ago

Fewer and fewer? Haven't you been following the polls? The Dauphin hasn't exactly had a good last few months and the trend is that more and more voters are "buying" it.

15 ^ | v · Share ›



This comment was deleted.



RZA79 → GrumpyOldeMan · 6 days ago

So what are you basing your so-called fewer and fewer assumptions on if not statistics? Is it the word on the street or just amongst your public sector union buddies?

11 ^ | v · Share ›



Rodimus Prime → RZA79 · 6 days ago

Yeah...he based it on "polls", but when you call him on it, he name calls. He's just another lefty loser.

10 ^ | v · Share ›



Bob in DDO → Rodimus Prime · 5 days ago

to call you a righty loser is redundant...

4 ^ | v · Share ›



Steve Warnar → Rodimus Prime · 6 days ago

" Lefty Losers " !

Isn't that Warren Kinsella's band !

4 ^ | v · Share ›



Bob in DDO → Steve Warnar · 5 days ago

the tone deafs, a good name for Steve's band or his Con base

4 ^ | v · Share ›



 This comment was deleted.

[Load more comments](#)

 [Subscribe](#)

 [Add Disqus to your site](#)

 [Privacy](#)