

## So many women, so little time

Coronation Street's Roache regales N.S. crowd with tales of a full life

By **ANDREA NEMETZ**  
Entertainment Reporter

**K**EN BARLOW has had 24 girlfriends and three wives, but William Roache, the actor who plays him, may have had 1,000 conquests.

The Coronation Street icon delighted a packed audience for the first of two shows at Casino Nova Scotia's Schooner Room on Friday night with brilliant storytelling and natural charm despite a nasty cough he picked up on his cross-Canada tour that began March 15 in Ottawa and ended after Saturday's matinee.

Roache, who has been with the show since it debuted in 1960 and holds the Guinness Book of Records title for longest-running character in a televised soap opera, looks nowhere near the 80th birthday he will celebrate next month.

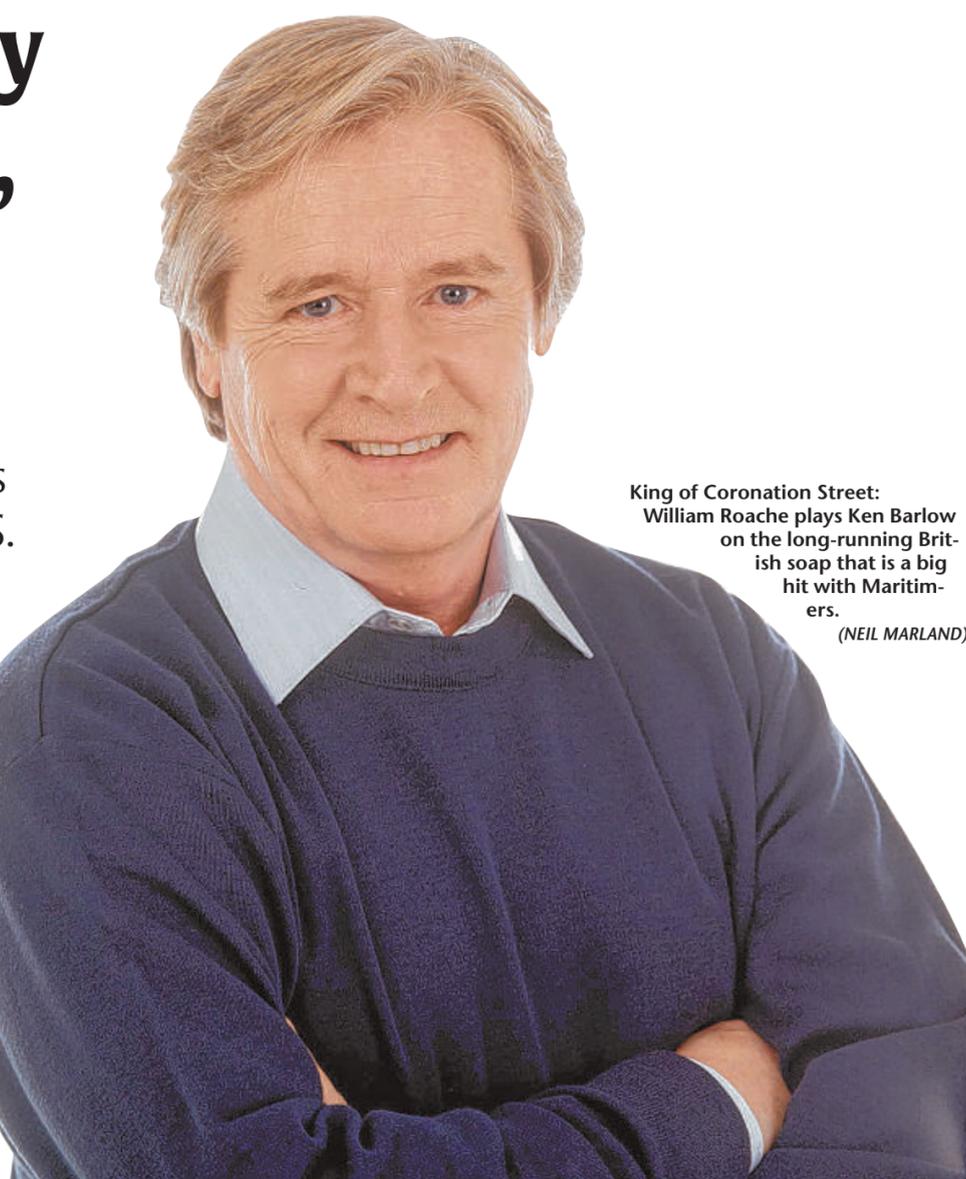
Slim, with ramrod straight posture, and impeccably turned out in a dark blue suit, the actor spent an hour regaling the appreciative audience with tales of growing up in Derbyshire, England, his career with the Royal Welch Fusiliers and his first forays into acting, which included advice from Sir Laurence Olivier.

After declaring he was off for a cup of tea, he returned to answer questions from fans.

The first was whether Roache, in real life, had slept with Anne Kirkbride, the actress who plays his wife Deirdre on Coronation Street.

The second was whether there was any truth to the rumours Roache had slept with 1,000 women.

With a twinkle in his eye, and a suggestion the audience was "a naughty lot," Roache emphatically stated he had never slept with



**King of Coronation Street:** William Roache plays Ken Barlow on the long-running British soap that is a big hit with Maritimers. (NEIL MARLAND)

*'He asked me if I had made love to a hundred women and I said "I don't know." He asked if I had made love to a thousand women and I said "I don't know." I don't know, but it would be wonderful.'*

**WILLIAM ROACHE**  
Coronation Street veteran

Kirkbride, though he declared he "dearly loves" the woman who is "like a big earth mother to everyone on set" with a handbag with "everything in it" and says that's better than a sexual relationship.

And he talked about the interview with British talk show host Piers Morgan (for a show called Life Stories which isn't available in North America) which gave birth to the rumours.

"Piers likes to find out naughty things about you," Roache said, noting he was a very bad boy in the 1960s, who smoked, drank and had lots of girlfriends.

"He asked me if I had made love to a hundred women and I said 'I don't know.' He asked if I had made love to a thousand women and I said 'I don't know.' I don't know, but it would be wonderful," he said with a sly smile.

Roache admits to "fancying" the Queen — "a very attractive young woman" when he met her for the first time prior to her coronation in 1953 at the regiment he was stationed with in Jamaica. He recounted that "Her Majesty was thrilled to discover the regimental goat ate cigarettes."

Awarded the MBE in 2001, Roache has met Queen Elizabeth II a dozen times, noting "she is always delightful, she loves humour, she's very gentle and loves it if you can make her laugh."

Roache says he loves politically incorrect characters on the show like Ina and Blanche. The blunt-spoken Blanche, played by Maggie Jones, who died in 2009, was his all-time favourite.

"I loved seeing a line and waiting to see how Maggie would deliver it. She's brilliant."

And he says Betty Williams, beloved barmaid in Rover's Return, played by Betty Driver, who died last year, will be getting a thoroughly good send-off with three or four episodes very soon. Her son Gordon (Bill Kenwright) will be coming up for the memorial service.

"She was the godmother to James, my son," Roache says of the actress' real-life role in his life. He admired how, though nearly 92 when she died, she "was vibrant and lively to the end."

His sons James, 26 and Linus, 48, are both actors.

Roache said his grandfather and father were both doctors and he was expected to follow in their footsteps but wasn't very good at sciences while studying at the Rydal School in Wales, where he played cricket and rugby and joined the drama club, not because he saw it as a vocation, but because "he was looking for an idle way of life."

He's proud of his sons, who appeared with him on Coronation Street in 2010, and glowed

See **ROACHE** / B3

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## Book offers tips on fresh ways to see, photograph nature

### PIXELS PLUS



**LEN WAGG**

I was driving in a rural part of the province last week and I saw a scene that looked great, but I realized I had taken a photograph of this scene a few months ago.

I was about to drive away but the old line — "There are none so blind as those who wish not to see" — came to mind and I did stop. I looked at the scene and shot it in a way that was different than I had done it before. It also got me to thinking about how we can start to take beautiful scenes for granted.

There are many ways to keep your creative juices flowing and one of these is to read and get

some ideas from people who are out there shooting all the time.

One of my favourite publishers of photography books is Rocky Nook (www.rockynook.com). The majority of books are written by working photographers and the titles and subjects of books are as varied as the art or hobby we strive to get better at.

Nature and Landscape Photography: 71 tips from the Top is a small book you can pick up for \$23 and it gives you 71 tips (not 72) on nature and landscape photography. It is written by Martin Borg, who illustrates his tips with photos he has shot over the last 20 years.

I'm not going to turn this column into a book review and I'm not going to give you all the tips (you will have to buy the book for that), but I will paraphrase a few that will help give you an idea of how he got his pictures. (Call me old school but you can visit thousands of websites to get some ideas or you can buy the book and



This image uses at least three tips from Martin Borg's book, Nature and Landscape Photography: 71 tips from the Top. (LEN WAGG)

bring it with you to read while you are waiting for the light.)

Some of the tips include:

1. Get up and at 'em and head out while the light is waking up the world.
2. Search for harmony, nature's patterns and lines.
3. Recognize the right opportunities. Shoot what makes you go wow.
4. Less is more. Think composition.

5. Don't forget about people. Use them to give subjects perspective.

6. Begin at your front door (see above).

7. Discover new environments and go places you have not been.

8. Keep an eye on the weather. The light can do great things on days that are not sunny and clear.

9. Make it fun. The more fun you have on shooting trips, the more you will want to head out.

10. After the sun goes down,

shoot at night with all the lights and stars.

Each tip has helpful hints, a photo and the details on how the image was shot.

Oh, and there are another 61 tips to get you out and on your way as well.

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## CELEBRITIES IN THE NEWS



Australian actor Barry Humphries, dressed as Dame Edna Everage.

### Dame Edna retiring with farewell tour

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Dame Edna Everage, the Tony Award-winning drag act known for her purple hair and oversized rhinestone eyeglasses, will soon open her final stage show tour in Australia. It comes 57 years after her debut.

Barry Humphries, the actor and satirist who created Australia's self-proclaimed housewife-superstar, wants to take the farewell show Eat Pray Laugh! to Britain and New York over the next two years following the two-month Australian tour that begins in Canberra on June 22, his publicist Kerry O'Brien said.

At 78, Humphries said the time had come to retire all his various alter egos from the stage, the most famous of whom is Dame Edna.

"She's a little weary of touring and strange hotels," Humphries told Australian Broadcasting Corp. radio in Canberra, explaining his most enduring character's decision to retire.

### Movie posters from '30s sell for \$500,000

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — A collection of rare movie theatre posters found in a northeastern Pennsylvania attic has fetched a total of \$503,000 at auction.

The sale of 33 posters from the Golden Age of Hollywood ended Friday at Heritage Auctions in Texas.

The auction house said a rare 1931 poster for the movie Dracula topped the list with a selling price of \$143,400. It sold to an anonymous overseas buyer.

A surprise of the auction was the \$101,575 price paid for the rare poster of the 1931 movie Cimarron, the first Western to win the Best Picture Academy Award.

The posters were stuck together with wallpaper glue when they were purchased for around \$30,000 at a country auction last fall in Berwick. The rare find was revealed as they were steamed apart.

### Oates wins lifetime achievement award

MONTREAL (CP) — Renowned author Joyce Carol Oates has been awarded the 2012 Blue Metropolis International Literary Grand Prix.

The festival says the \$10,000 prize acknowledges a lifetime of achievement by the internationally acclaimed author.

Oates, who has written more than 50 novels as well as volumes of short stories and poems, published her first book in 1963.

She has been nominated three times for a Pulitzer Prize and won the National Book Award in 1969 for "them."

Oates, 73, has taught in Princeton University's creative writing program since 1978.

Previous winners of the prize include Norman Mailer and Margaret Atwood.

The Blue Metropolis festival will be held April 18-23 in Montreal.

### Hunger Games earns \$68 million in one day

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The feast is on: The Hunger Games has taken in \$68.25 million domestically in its first day, a record for a non-sequel.

The Friday total for Lionsgate's The Hunger Games was the fifth-best opening day ever and puts the movie on track for the best debut weekend ever in March. That record is held by Alice in Wonderland with \$116.1 million.

The big start should translate into an opening weekend of as much as \$140 million domestically, according to Paul Dergarabedian, analyst for box-office tracker Hollywood.com.

# The Shins starting second act

## Mercer returns after five-year absence, without original band

By **BEN SISARIO**  
The New York Times

PORTLAND, Ore. — The doorbell at James Mercer's house — a spacious, tastefully appointed Victorian on a quiet residential street here — buzzes with an old-fashioned clang so loud it's almost tactile. When he answered it on a damp Saturday morning recently, Mercer, the lead singer of the indie-rock band the Shins, was just sitting down to breakfast with his wife and two young daughters, and he seemed eager to talk.

He recounted the architectural history of the house in detail and hospitably showed off his barn turned recording studio in the backyard. But once conversation turned to Port of Morrow (Aural Apothecary / Columbia), the Shins' new album, he revealed some worries. For one thing, it had been a long time since the last Shins record. Maybe too long.

"I realized it will be five years since the last thing, and I remember thinking: Stone Roses," he said, referring to the British band whose reputation fell from, roughly, messiah to unwanted house guest in the five years between its first album (in 1989) and its second. "I was scared," he added.

Mercer's fans are used to his self-doubts as well as his warmth. The Shins, which he founded in Albuquerque, N.M., in 1996, became one of the most beloved alternative bands of the 2000s, exploring evergreen topics like romantic anxiety and adult growing pains with a jangly, idiosyncratic sound and Mercer's strikingly naked vocals. As the group climbed to commercial peaks — movie soundtracks, almost two million total record sales — it came to represent a trajectory of indie success that remains somewhat rare.

Yet with Port of Morrow Mercer, 41, faces what could be his biggest challenge. Since the Shins were last heard from he has dismissed the rest of the band and remade it as a semi-permanent collective of well-travelled professionals, and also moved further away from the Shins' scruffy origins with a tightly produced, eclectic record. Will his fans accept the changes?

The new album, produced by Greg Kurstin (Lily Allen, the Bird and the Bee) with Mercer, has some comfortingly familiar moments, like Mercer hitting the



James Mercer, lead singer of the Shins, has a collection of vintage instruments in his studio, a converted barn behind his home, in Portland, Ore. After a five-year gap, the indie-rock band the Shins is back with a new album, Port of Morrow, and a new lineup. (SUNG PARK / The New York Times)

emphatic high end of his tenor in the first single, Simple Song, and surf guitar breezes in For a Fool. But the newer kinks in the texture — martial themes, some Brazilian-inspired beats — might take some getting used to.

Mercer, who also plays guitar, made it clear that he was prepared for some blowback. And he had a ready answer to the question of whether the Shins without the old lineup — Jesse Sandoval on drums, Marty Crandall on keyboards and Dave Hernandez on guitar and bass — were still the Shins.

"This thing is something I started in my bedroom as a recording project, and to an extent it has always been that way," he said. "Its true nature is about the recordings. It's about me having my esthetic vision realized however possible and then figuring out how to take that vision on the road."

The touring version of the Shins includes the guitarist Jessica Dobson, who has played with Beck; the bassist Yuuki Matthews, of the band Crystal Skulls; Joe Plummer, the drummer in Modest Mouse; and Richard

Swift, a songwriter and go-to indie producer.

The Shins began as a solo vehicle for Mercer, but by the time of the group's debut, Oh, Inverted World (Sub Pop), in 2001, a lineup had coalesced, and the music press embraced the group as sensitive innovators with a mischievous streak. On the first album and the equally celebrated follow-up, Chutes Too Narrow (2003), the group could sound delicate or agitated yet never lost its smooth melodicism, and Mercer's near-falsetto seemed to scrape at both pleasures and fears.

The band's sound was slightly out of step with the retro minimalism sweeping alt-rock in the early 2000s with the Strokes and the White Stripes, but the music struck a chord. Robin Hilton of NPR Music characterized the early Shins albums as classic rite-of-passage themes set against a broad post-Sept. 11 dissonance in American culture. (NPR, a longtime supporter, sponsored a recent Shins concert in New York to promote its new iPad app.)

"They became the soundtrack

for this huge period of transition," Hilton said. "Gen-Xers were starting to become 30-somethings, and Millennials were just coming of age, and the music came across as kind of a struggle within itself, this whole push and pull of: 'Who will I become? What are we supposed to do with our lives?'"

The songs on Port of Morrow still feature plenty of strained relationships and layers of questioning introspection. But there is also a newfound maturity that Mercer said came with being a parent. Watching his daughters, who are two and four, finish their breakfast of fresh fruit and scamper off to play, he said that fatherhood had pushed him to look outside of himself for inspiration.

A few of the new songs are even topical. The Rifle's Spiral, which opens the album, is a nightmare of religious war in the Middle East, and the incongruously upbeat, Beck-like No Way Down was written after he read an article about outsourced labour. The title track, which ends the album, is a grim meditation on death.

**ROBIN HILTON**  
NPR Music

# Gypsophilia continues to dazzle, startle

By **STEPHEN PEDERSEN**

## CONCERT REVIEW

Apart from superb musicianship, Halifax's Gypsophilia has staked its tents on several musical fault lines which are troubled from moment to moment by subterranean tremors of jazz-pop, gypsy jazz, Parisian cafe pop, klezmer and unpredictable raw creativity from all seven of them.

While every one of their enthusiastic fans knows in their bones who and what they are, the band continues to resist definition eight years after it chose Django Reinhardt as its stylistic launching pad.

There is something unfinished about them which is quixotically attention-grabbing. They do display polish, especially in this concert, but you never know what the next moment will bring. They never lost Django since the started up in 2004, but now his style rubs along comfortably with all the others like pebbles in a cement-mixer.

All we can do by way of definition is to identify the quark-like fields of musical atoms they

breeze over. And admire them, of course, while their happiness-maddened fans, awash in bliss, writhe about as loosely as long grass in a high wind.

Friday night, in a Symphony Nova Scotia's Maritime Pops concert, the band finally got a shot at the Cohn stage with access to the best back-up musicians in the nation. As a soft-seater, there was no chance in the Cohn of dancing to their tunes, except internally. Deprived of this outlet for their energies, the sold-out crowd discovered with ears alone what first-class players Gypsophilia are.

The concert began with SNS playing Bela Bartok's Roumanian Dances, very romantically under resident conductor Shalom Bard's direction, but also very brilliantly, very colourfully, and very precisely.

Bard hit his stride in this performance and continued for the

rest of the evening to confidently capture the Gypsophilia spirit in arrangements of their original tunes by Chris Palmer, Rebecca Pellet and David Christensen, as well as Gypsophilia's bass player Adam Fine, trumpeter Matt Myer and their formidable pianist Sageev Oore.

Oore applies classical technique where it counts with Lisztian flourishes and top-speed rhythmic riffs as powerful as a full-fisted, 10-fingered Rachmaninoff finale. His contribution of an original premiere he called Happy Polka, arranged for piano, band and full orchestra, gave a full workout to SNS's Christine Feierabend on piccolo and flutist Patricia Creighton.

Guitarist Ross Burns entertained as emcee and contributed a tribute to his 100-year-old grandmother, a sweet tune called Opa. Guitarist Nick Wilkinson gave us a craggy tune called Skirmish, and guitarist Alex Frith, one of the most naturally musical players in the band, played bluesy solos and wrote an engaging tune he called Super Bowl Party.

Matt Myers contributed a win-

some ditty called Valse Povero and kept the band focused with wonderfully integrated trumpet solos and riffs and Hammond B3 fills from his Choro 3 keyboard.

Bassist Adam Fine anchored the band with punchy bass-lines and a bowed solo in his original tune, Goncourt.

If Gypsophilia could be said to have a soul, it would be the easy jazzy musicality of violinist Gina Burgess who channeled Stephane Grapelli from tune to tune. She too has classical chops, which showed up in a subtle double-stop passage in Opa, straight out of the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto.

Her original tune, Zachary's Czardas, was as highly coloured by Gypsy violinistics as anyone could wish for. Her remarkably rich, smooth and polished sound, and her lively, inventive solos and fills even turned a few heads in the violin section of the orchestra, all of whom know her anyway since she subs-in from time to time on SNS concerts.

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## Roache

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as he recited accomplishments by Linus, who went to drama school, appeared on stage with the National Theatre, starred on TV's Law and Order as executive ADA Michael Cutter and was Batman's father in Batman Begins.

Roache didn't go to drama school, learning his craft through engagements at various repertory theatres. He didn't even want to audition for Coronation Street, described to him by his agent as "a comedy serial" because he was happy living in his flat in London and working on stage.

He agreed to shoot the pilot because it was three days paid work and because his agent told him these would only run 11 weeks.

Actually, two pilots were shot, one with Philip Lowrie as Ken and one with Roache as Ken. Lowrie went on to play Dennis Tanner. Roache notes he hadn't seen Tanner since he left the show in 1968 until Tanner returned in 2011. Lowrie "will be staying in the street," spending time with old flame Rita Sullivan (Barbara Knox), reports Roache.

Life as a Coronation Street actor is very busy, reports Roache, noting the show shoots

from 8 a.m. till 7:30 p.m. six days a week with three units filming all the time.

"It's a big cast of about 70," he says, noting that because the cast is so big, people will say to him from time to time "are you still in it?"

It's obvious from the dazzling display of flashbulbs and prolonged applause Nova Scotians are happy Roache is still part of the street.

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