



TV / FILM

"A SINISTER CABAL OF SUPERIOR WRITERS"

REVIEW

Movie Review: *Ronnie Hawkins - Still Alive And Kickin'*

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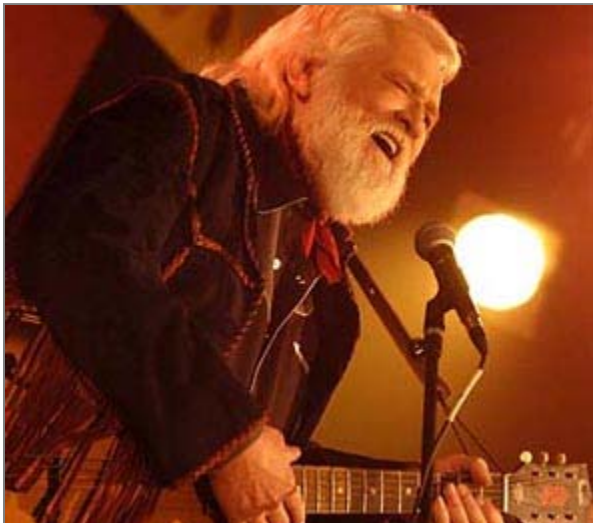


He's been called everything from a legend to larger than life. He's played rock and roll music since before it was rock and roll and some of the best rock and roll musicians in the world have been members of his band. He's been friends to everyone from Bill Clinton to John Lennon.

He's watched the kids who came to him as part of his band go on to achieve the fame and fortune that's always eluded him, that he keeps saying is only just around the corner. He has a well-deserved reputation as a hard living partier, but he's been married to Wanda for close to forty years. Anyone who has ever come in contact with him is charmed by his character and warmed by the glow of his heart and his smile.

But in 2002 all that mattered was a malignant lump was found on his pancreas. When it became obvious that surgery wasn't going to be an answer - the lump was intermingled too tightly with a major artery - it was as if he had been sentenced to death. When word leaked out he was dying, no one wanted to believe it; Ronnie Hawkins - "The Hawk" - wasn't supposed to go out like this

Somewhere along the line Ronnie and his long-suffering wife Wanda made the decision to go public with the way in which this affected their lives, and allowed a documentary film crew into their lives for even the most personal of events. (I don't know about anyone else but those hospital blue gowns they give you as a patient are embarrassing enough as it is without being filmed in one.) The result is the highly emotional, and very scatological (this is Ronnie Hawkins we're talking about, remember) documentary *Ronnie Hawkins: Still Alive And Kickin'* which is now available on DVD.



Since they thought they were documenting the last days of an icon, the DVD gives us a wonderful history of the Rompin' Ronnie. Starting out at Sun Records in Memphis with all the usual suspects — Elvis, Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis, and more — Ronnie never quite caught on to the extent the others did. Whether it was because he was always a bit of a rebel or just one of those quirks of fate is impossible to tell fifty years later.

What we do know are the incredible numbers of people who Ronnie has influenced and touched throughout his career. Probably the most famous version of The Hawks, his backup band, was the one playing with him that became better known as The Band: Robbie Robertson, Richard Manuel, Rick Danko, Garth Hudson, and Levon Helm, and who achieved far more success than their former boss ever did.

Then there are all those whose lives have intersected with Ronnie's and have in one way or another been affected by that meeting. One of the hardest moments in the film to watch was Kris Kristofferson finding himself having to give a speech about Ronnie only moments after finding out about the tumour. He's halfway through his speech when he breaks down in tears, unable to continue.



That's when you remember what the reality is for Ronnie at this time in his life. He might be putting on a brave face in public, being his usual bigger than life self, but away from the crowds it's a struggle. It's during these times away from the limelight that director Anne Pick and her crew show their real talent for being the fly on the wall, listening in and recording.

In the approximately two years from the initial diagnosis to the miraculous recovery, Anne and her film crew have created an agonizingly real record of a family struggling in the face of horrible adversity. Not only is Ronnie thought to be dying, there's no money coming in and their bank account is being bled dry.

In fact things are so tight that when the pump for their well breaks they don't have the money to replace it and are reduced to melting snow on their stove for water. Even without that calamity the strain on everyone was finally beginning to show. Ronnie is almost perpetually angry; Wanda looks like she's barely keeping it together, and their children are walking around like automatons.

Just as you think that your heart can't take any more of this, comes the news that the most recent biopsy came back benign. The cancer had vanished. Even more shocking was that a CT scan showed that the tumour, which had been growing, had completely disappeared. Refusing to believe their eyes, the doctors order an MRI scan which only confirms the results. The tumour and the cancer have magically disappeared.

Nobody wants to say it, but it looks like this was the work of a sixteen-year-old young man named Adam in British Columbia. Adam had offered Ronnie his services as a "dream" healer to attempt to break up the cancer and the tumour and clean his body of the disease. Ronnie had agreed, because as he said, what did he have to lose, and Adam had set to work.

Ronnie would simply lie down in bed and try to relax as much as possible, and Adam, nearly 3,000 miles away would visualize the area in his body where the tumour was in terms of a disruption and blockage of energy, and attempt to break up the block to allow energy to flow properly again. However it happened, the one thing everyone agreed on was it was a miracle.

There is an absolutely brilliant scene where he's telling Robbie Robertson the good news, and Robertson is just stunned. First he says, "Well it must have been all that clean living" and they both start laughing. Then later in an interview, still not having completely absorbed the good news, he says something to the effect of, "Oh great you go around telling everyone you've got terminal cancer, and now you say, 'Just kidding.' Don't expect any of us to believe you the next time you say you're dying."

Pancreatic cancer is a death sentence from which no one is supposed to recover. Somehow or other Ronnie Hawkins managed the impossible. It's not something that's easy to believe when you just hear about it, even without the "faith healing" element involved. But we know it happened because of the amazing record of the events that was kept

by director Anne Pick and her extraordinary documentary *Ronnie Hawkins: Still Alive And Kickin'*

If you know who Ronnie is you'll want to see this film to get to know him a little better as a human being. What's great about Ronnie is that it turns out that he's pretty much what you thought he was like. He really is rough and tumble with a heart of gold.

For those of you who don't know Ronnie, all I can say this is a great opportunity for you to make up for lost time, and to count your blessings that he's still around for you to get to know. Whether it was the "good clean living" or "the whisky, pot and faith healin'" that kept Ronnie with us, we will never know. All I know is the world is a lot brighter a place with him in it.

Bill Clinton summed it up best when he said, "If more people were like Ronnie Hawkins, the world would be a lot better place to live in."



Richard Marcus is a long - haired Canadian iconoclast who writes reviews and opines on the world as he sees it at [Leap In The Dark](#) and [Desicritics](#)

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