

Heartland rock beyond borders

Almost as impressive as Mellencamp's set was the fact that – an hour or so before it was even set to begin – the bulk of the seats in the venue already appeared to be filled.

Could all those fans have made a point of showing up early, to catch homegrown hero Tom Cochrane's set in its entirety?

Our guess would be yes, especially after witnessing the ease with which Cochrane – a former Lynn Lake resident who's easily the Canadian equivalent of a "heartland rocker" – related to the crowd.

His hour-long set was heavy on the hits (our faves were the Red Rider tracks Human Race and Lunatic Fringe, but we've always been a bit crazy for the '80s), and even when he wasn't singing, Cochrane always had a bit of folksy banter ready.

And just in case he wasn't picking up on all the love coming his way – (not only did the crowd help him with the high notes on Good Times, they also went crazy every time he mentioned hockey during the intro to Big Leagues) – there could be no mistaking the fans' motivation when they gave him that rarest of honours: the opening act encore.

David Schmeichel - Winnipeg Sun - Feb 12 2008