



Ron Sexsmith Had Nothing to Prove but Everything to Offer at Mariposa Folk Festival

Tudhope Park, July 6



Photo: Lindsay Duncan

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PUBLISHED JUL 7, 2025

Ron Sexsmith is one of Canada's greatest singer-songwriters. He's collaborated with icons like Feist and Leonard Cohen, and his songs have been covered by absolute legends across genres, including Michael Bublé and Elvis Costello. What's remarkable about Sexsmith, however, is how modest the 61-year-old artist remains, even after a storied career marked by many, many achievements.

After a short introduction from CBC's Tom Powers, who hosted the Sunday evening performances on the Mariposa Folk Festival Lightfoot Stage, Sexsmith walked inauspiciously to his mark — wearing his customary suit jacket and button-up shirt in the sweltering 27 C heat.

"The last time I played Mariposa [in 2011]... it was at the behest of Emmylou Harris," he casually told the crowd, as though she isn't one of the biggest names in Americana.

This self-deprecating humour continued throughout the 11-song set. Sexsmith leaned into this affable persona, poking fun at himself and his material while simultaneously expressing sincere gratitude for his career. He maintains a boyish charm that complements his fingerstyle acoustic guitar and warm vocal delivery. His voice is clear and rich, punctuated with the occasional gentle falsetto.



Sexsmith was accompanied by his longtime collaborators Don Kerr (guitar) and Jason Mercer (bass). The trio enchanted the crowd with a stripped-down performance that showcased Sexsmith's raw, intimate style. It's non-confrontational, comfortable songwriting with enough heart and variation to keep even the most critical listeners interested.

Following a string of under-appreciated gems like "Up the Road" and "Hard Bargain," Sexsmith switched from acoustic guitar to piano — asking the crowd, "Do you mind?" before joking that he might "play piano terribly." He pledged, "I'm going to do my best," then played "Spring of the Following Year" from 2020's *Hermitage*. ("I hit a bunch of bum notes," he would apologize later, although if he did, it wasn't obvious.)

From there, he moved into "Brandy Alexander," the bittersweet tune he co-wrote with Feist, before playing one of his best-known tracks, "Gold in Them Hills" from 2002's *Cobblestone Runway*. The familiar melodies drew in the crowd, settling into the evening's tranquil beauty.

With the audience now fully engaged, Sexsmith introduced two songs from his upcoming album, *Hangover Terrace*: "Don't Lose Sight" and "Cigarette and Cocktail." The former is a heartfelt, mid-tempo love song, while the latter is a tongue-in-cheek meditation on aging and social change. Both tracks feel more pop-forward than much of his earlier work, yet still carry that unmistakable Sexsmith signature: melancholy with a wink.



Predictably, Sexsmith ended the set with "Secret Heart," which Rod Stewart covered on his 1998 album, *When We Were the New Boys*. Sexsmith joked about his age here too, noting the song was covered by Stewart, Feist, and "Bing Crosby, probably."

Ron Sexsmith has nothing left to prove; and yet, with new material dropping next month, the Canadian songwriter clearly has more to say. Given what we heard at the Mariposa Folk Festival this past weekend, *Hangover Terrace* will be worth listening to.

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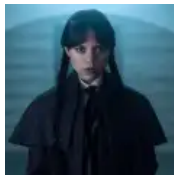
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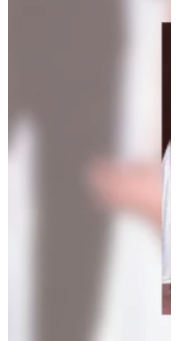
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