

Which is fastest ... fingers or the wit?

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PORT HARDY — It's hard to tell what Todd Butler can get to fly fastest — his fingers across the frets while flat-picking an acoustic guitar, or words employed in lampooning the general state of humanity.

In any case, fans were treated to hefty doses of both Saturday night at Port Hardy Civic Centre as the comedian, musician and political satirist headlined the North Island Concert Society's annual dinner theatre.

Butler, a 46-year-old transplanted Albertan now living in Courtenay, started and ended the show with his trademark parody songs. In between, he drew from a palette of entertainment that ranged from straight stand-up comedy to displays of the musical virtuosity that has taken on a greater role in his career in recent years.

His most recent CD, *Hamburger Soup*, is free of not only comedy, but any vocals at all — which is probably something of a shock to fans who have followed his scattershot verbal attacks on politicians and other high and mighty pub-



lic figures during his 25-year performing career.

Citing inspiration from Larry Carlton and Lee Ritenour, Butler has crafted an album that is reminiscent of both jazz guitarists, as well as the acoustic work of Leo Kottke, all mixed in with a funky groove that creates what he calls **FRAZZ** — funky roots jazz.

He opened the second set

with one of those instrumentals, the *Hornby Rag*, after closing out the first half of the show with a pair of non-funny tunes from 2005's Vancouver Island Music Award-winning CD, *Idle Canadian*. Hard to be a Hero is a scathing indictment of both country music fans and the Nashville establishment's abandonment of the Dixie Chicks following lead singer

Natalie Maines' critique of U.S. President George W. Bush, while *Home* — the VIMA Song of the Year in 2005 — is a plaintive yet uplifting story of search and discovery.

Those selections alone prove Butler has the chops and the voice to pull off a music concert without resorting to laughs. Saturday night, however, they were merely opportu-

nities for the crowd to catch its breath between guffaws as he took on political parties and politicians in both Canada and the U.S., celebrities, men, women, children, a good chunk of the populace not already listed in this sentence.

Using his guitar for nothing more than an armrest, Butler riffed through a series of one-liners while pulling mugs and double-

takes worthy of Henny Youngman or Rodney Dangerfield. As in, "I used to curl until I suffered an injury ... liver."

Taking up the guitar again, he took on a prominent Canadian who turned his back on the country — Conrad Black — and recognized former U.S. residents in the audience with *Bushed*, his ode to citizens who declined to vote for Bush and Dick Cheney in the last two American presidential elections.

Butler's comedic timing is impeccable and his ability with innuendo, double entendre and other linguistic devices is inspiring. He is also a gifted mimic, though his George W. Bush — "The problem with the French is they don't have a word for entrepreneur" — sounded eerily like former U.S. president Bill Clinton.

He managed shots at Saskatchewan, Alberta, BC Ferries, Paul McCartney, and localized the show with friendly digs at Alert Bay, Woss and Port Alice.

Perhaps the night was best summed up by two patrons heading out the doors at the end of the night. When one noted her ribs still hurt, her friend added, "I'm all laughed out."