

# 'Decorate your car and honk your horn!'

Canadian country music star Brett Kissel promises a unique show and a special experience at the Richmond Fairgrounds Sept. 19

BY JEFF MORRIS

*"The things that have always been important: to be a good man, to try to live my life the way God would have me, to turn it over to Him that His will might be worked in my life, to do my work without looking back, to give it all I've got, and to take pride in my work as an honest performer."*

**Johnny Cash**

It was Fri., Sept. 12, 2003.

Brett Kissel was a 13-year-old kid on a cattle ranch in Flat Lake, Alberta. He was having one of those moments that you would only see in the movie 'City Slickers.' It was the worst day of his life. It was also the best.

"My mom woke me up that morning," he recalled. "She told me she had good news and bad news. She gave me the good news first and told me that my CD release party and concert for that evening was sold out. Then she told me the bad news.

Johnny Cash had just passed away."

Johnny Cash was a fixture in Brett Kissel's young life, providing the background soundtrack for everything that went on in his life and in his family's home.

"I lived a wonderful life," he said. "When I was young, we listened to records. Some families had CDs or cassettes. We had a record player, and I think my parents had every single Johnny Cash record. That's what I played, and that's what we listened to."

Three months earlier, young Brett wrote to his idol. June Carter Cash, Johnny Cash's wife, had just died. Brett sent Johnny Cash a letter expressing his condolences.

pressing his condolences.

"Somehow, the letter reached him," Kissel said. "I will never forget it. I was getting ready for my CD release and concert. It was going to be in Glendon, Alberta, about 10 minutes away, and it was sold out. There were only 250 people in Glendon and there were 600 tickets sold so it was a pretty exciting night.

"My dad came home that night and he had a big yellow envelope. He handed it to me and said, 'Here, this came in the mail for you.' I opened it up, and there it was! Johnny Cash had sent me an autographed photo. It read, 'To Brett, Jesus First, Johnny Cash'. Here I was, on the day Johnny Cash died, and just before being on stage for the biggest moment of my life, I get this photo in the mail! I couldn't believe it."

From there, Brett Kissel's career took off, almost as if Johnny Cash has been watching over his shoulder. By the time he turned 16, he had released three more independent albums. At the 2006

Canadian Country Music Association Awards, he became the youngest person to ever be nominated for the Chevy Trucks Rising Star of the Year.

By 2013, Kissel was a 23-year-old artist who, even though he had seemingly been on the radar for years, was ready for his big break.

He signed a deal with Warner Music Canada and had a monster hit with 'Started With a Song'.

He followed that number one hit with 'Raise Your Glass' and '3-2-1', which also went to number one in Canada's Chevrolet Top 20 Countdown and also received airplay on Sirius XM Radio's mainstream country station, The Highway.

In 2014, Kissel won the Juno Award as Canada's Breakthrough Artist of

the Year, and then led all Canadian country singers with eight nominations at the Canadian Country Music Association Awards in Edmonton. He would wrap up the year by joining Brad Paisley on his Country World Nation Tour.



Canadian country music star Brett Kissel will be performing three drive-in shows at the Richmond Fairgrounds Sept. 19.

JESS BAUMUNG PHOTO

the Year, and then led all Canadian country singers with eight nominations at the Canadian Country Music Association Awards in Edmonton. He would wrap up the year by joining Brad Paisley on his Country World Nation Tour.

While big cities and big arenas are special for a performer, so are the grassroots venues across Canada and the country fairs. Brett Kissel has played at almost every country and small town fair in Ontario during his career. Playing live and connecting with fans has been a blessing that Kissel has never taken for granted.

One of Kissel's most memorable performances was not part of a tour or

a concert, or even the CMA Awards. It was at an Edmonton Oilers playoff game in 2017. Kissel, a huge Oilers fan, wrote the song, 'We're Gonna Win the Cup' for the Oilers playoff run. During Game 3 of the Oilers' series with the Anaheim Ducks, Kissel sang the national anthem. The audio in Edmonton's Rogers Place Arena failed during the anthem, and the entire crowd began singing to help get Kissel through the song. The clip of the anthem made news and sports highlight shows throughout Canada and the U.S. the next day, and footage of the song went viral on social media.

**KISSEL**

continues on page 13



Brett Kissel says he is excited about returning to the Richmond Fairgrounds. "Every time I have played in the Ottawa area, we have never had anything short of a 10 out of 10 experience."

JESS BAUMUNG PHOTO

**KISSEL** continues from page 12

“Singing the anthem at an NHL game is a thrill because it’s right before the game and there is so much energy and anticipation in the building,” Kissel said. “That was a special moment for me. I love hockey and I have been an Oilers fan all my life, so singing the anthem at an Oilers game is like a dream come true. But connecting with fans through a national anthem isn’t the same as doing a live show. When you do the anthem, you just want to get the song done and get out of the way for the game to start. The fans aren’t there to see me, they are there to see a game.”

On Sat., Sept. 19, local country music fans will be there to see Brett Kissel. The 30-year-old recording artist returns to the Richmond Fairgrounds for a drive-in concert. It is something he promises will be a special and unique experience to everyone in attendance.

“I’m looking forward to coming back to the Richmond Fairgrounds,” Kissel said, sounding like a performer who has been in quarantine and who just wants to get out and play in front of people. “I have never had anything less than a 10 out of 10 experience coming to the Ottawa area – whether it’s Richmond or Navan or Carleton Place or Pembroke. The fans are incredible and there are two great radio stations – Country 101 and Pure Country 94 – that have been wonderful to me.”

The first show for the night of Sept. 19 sold out almost immediately. A second show was added for 4:30 p.m. After it sold out, a 1 p.m. show was added.

The drive-in show will permit 250 cars to park on the fairgrounds lawn in front of the Heavy Horse Barn. A stage and screens will be set up right behind the Richmond Community Centre. Fans in their cars will be able to tune into a special frequency to hear the show. There will also be speakers set up on stage.

“I know that it’s different than what people are used to when they go to a show, but we are in a different time right now and we have to make the most of the opportunities we have,” Kissel said. “What I promise is that we are going to have a great show, and give everyone a special experience.”

Kissel added that he and other performers can’t rely on “same old, same old” during the pandemic. He is a very interactive performer with his audience and understands that the parameters of what he will be able to do for the show are different.

“It’s not meant to be awkward, it’s meant to be unique,” Kissel said of the concert at the Richmond Fairgrounds. “Country music is going to bring people back together. For 2020, this is all we can do, so come on out and enjoy it.”

Kissel has performed successful drive-in concerts in Edmonton and in



**Now or Never, Brett Kissel’s fourth studio album with Warner Music Canada, was released earlier this year.**

Saskatchewan. Last month, he held one of the most unique concerts ever held in Canada. He played on a dock for 90 minutes for a “boat pop-up concert” on Lake Windermere in Kootenay, BC.

“It must be the largest concert of that type ever held in Canada,” Kissel said. “People drove up in their boats and there were 3,000 people there. There were all kinds of different boats of all sizes, and some were even there in canoes and kayaks. It was a special night and a great experience – something that the people there will remember for a long time.”

At his shows this year, Kissel has been playing a selection of songs from his catalogue, including his Canadian number

one hit and American debut single ‘Drink About Me’. He will also play other songs from his fourth studio album released by Warner Music Canada, ‘Now or Never’, which was released in January, 2020.

While the Richmond Fairgrounds is not quite a scenic lake in the mountains, it is a place where people will come together and celebrate music.

“I want people to come out to the Richmond Fairgrounds and have fun,” Kissel said. “Decorate your car, honk your horn. We can make this a great night.”

The show in Richmond is not part of a tour. After the show, Kissel will return to Alberta, where he and his wife and four-year-old daughter are living during

the pandemic. The family lives in Nashville, but they were in Canada when the COVID shut down hit.

When Brett Kissel finally does get the chance to go home, no matter how many shows he has played in front of how many people in however many cities, he will never forget that first show in Glendon, Alberta.

“I still have that picture from Johnny Cash,” he said. “It’s in what is definitely the most expensive frame I have ever purchased. It’s on its own wall.”

Tickets for the Brett Kissel Drive-In Concert at the Richmond Fairgrounds presented by Caivan are available at <https://ottawa.brettkissel.com>.