

Valentine's Day show not just for lovers: Blues double bill next up for Tour De Fort

By Allan Bradbury
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While one lives in southern Ontario and the other lives in Melbourne, Australia, both Suzie Vinnick and Lloyd Spiegel have great passions for blues music and both came to the genre at a young age.

Growing up in Saskatoon, Suzie Vinnick started playing the guitar at age nine with plans of starting a band with a childhood friend. That band never came together but as Vinnick continued to learn, she fell in love with music.

"Over the years growing up I participated in school bands... and learned how to play bass and I started going to dance lessons with a couple of my friends and got introduced to blues music," Vinnick said. "So I'd go to this little bar in Saskatoon called Buds on Broadway in the late '80s. Every Saturday we'd get up and jam and I got to hear live music and the fans and the bar was great, they let me hang around as a teenager and hear music."

Vinnick says she met a lot of musicians coming through the bar and eventually connected with blues guitarist Tony D. After living in Saskatoon a while, D returned to Ottawa where he is from and invited Vinnick to play music in Ottawa one summer.

"That kind of opened doors for me," Vinnick said of playing with D. "We played together for a couple years and I ended up moving to Ottawa and then Toronto and I've been doing music full-time for over 20 years now."

For Lloyd Spiegel, blues was in his home from a very young age. His father was a founding member of the Melbourne blues Appreciation Society. Which meant that there was a never-ending stream of blues musicians coming through his home as a child.

"There was always blues artists coming to stay when they traveled from overseas or from different parts of Australia," Spiegel said. "We had blues players in the living room most weekends."

Spiegel says having seen his father work as an auto mechanic and then watched these blues artists ply their trade his mind was made up.

"I decided they had a better job," Spiegel said. "From the age of four or five I'd already decided that was a path I wanted to take. So by the time I was eight years old I was going to the local blues jams and getting up with local blues artists and started touring around [the age of] 11."

Spiegel says blues really appealed to him as a child and he thinks any child who was exposed to it at a young age

would fall in love.

"I think if you expose any child at that age to blues music they'll probably fall in love with it," Spiegel said. "I don't think I was different or special in any way. I think it's a non-abrasive, easy to follow, simple form of music for everybody and kids react to it really well. I certainly know my kids have grown up with it as just a normal part of life. I guess I was probably 10 years old before I realized that all the other kids weren't listening to blues."

Like Vinnick, Spiegel's instrument of choice when it comes to blues is the guitar and he's well-known for it in blues circles. He says he picked up the guitar because it was what was available.

"Honestly, there was a guitar in the house, and that's what I decided to make a racket on," Spiegel said. "Most of the players that came to stay with my family were solo blues guitarists, acoustic blues guitarists, so I really always loved the acoustic blues guitar."

"I've certainly never considered myself a guitarist," Spiegel said. "I know that other people do and I appreciate it. I know that guitar magazines like to talk about my guitar style but the reality is that there was a guitar in the house and I consider myself a blues artist and the guitar was the tool that I happen to be handed."



"Suzie Vinnick is the proud owner of a gorgeous voice, impressive guitar and bass chops and an engagingly candid performance style. Suzie has won 10 Maple Blues Awards, 1 Canadian Folk Music Award and is a 3X Juno Nominee."

—Press photo

While Spiegel doesn't think of himself as very much when it comes to his guitar playing, Australian Guitar Player Magazine calls Spiegel "A guitarist almost without peer." Then goes on to say, "Spiegel deconstructs how the blues guitar is supposed to operate, makes sweet love to it, then kicks it out the back door."

Neither Vinnick nor Spiegel would consider themselves exclusively blues artists though that is the majority of what both of them play. Vinnick also calls herself a roots artist.

"I call it roots and blues music," she said. "I spent a lot of time listening to blues and playing blues music as a teenager and into my 20s but I also have a lot of other musical influences as well. Through high school I played in our stage band and jazz band so I got into jazz music a bit. And even before my introduction to blues I was listening to classic rock. There's a lot of music that does weave its way into the music that I perform but I say that it's blues based."

When it comes to his shows, Spiegel says he likes to mix things up.

"I really like to mix a healthy dose of blues guitar with singer-songwriter material, and comedy storytelling," he said. "I want to put on a complete show, all of my heroes are entertainers rather than musicians."

"They're triple threats, but I can't dance." He added with a chuckle.

Both musicians also say they're ready to get out for a full tour in the post-pandemic world. After being sequestered in his native Australia Spiegel says he's ready to play for Canadian audiences again.

"I've toured Canada several times before, and found that of all the places around the world

that I've ever traveled, and I mean this, I feel like I've found my people," Spiegel said. "It was a really wonderful experience, each time, to travel to Canada and I find that storytelling a blues mix beautifully."

Spiegel says he finds that the storytelling and music blend in his show doesn't always land with other audiences as well as it lands with Canadian audiences.

"A lot of places around the world are one or the other. I can do my storytelling show or I can do my blues guitar show and very seldom do I find the country that understands both," Spiegel said, "So I really did find that (Canadians) have been my best audiences."

"I'm mostly excited," Vinnick said of hitting the road. "I had COVID late in the fall, so if I hadn't had it I'd probably be a little bit more nervous. It does make me a bit nervous as far as getting sick and the challenges of traveling, but hopefully we'll stay healthy. It'll be really wonderful, more importantly, to be playing music and getting to see folks again and interacting, and I'm really excited to be touring with Lloyd Spiegel."

After meeting in the past, before COVID, Vinnick and Spiegel hit it off and hoped to play together for a while now and are both complementary of each other.

Spiegel says he loves that they both seem to come at blues from the same angle.

"Sharing the bill with Suzie is wonderful, because she comes from a similar idea in taking blues music as a foundation of what you're doing and then building upon it to sound unique and have your own sound that doesn't necessarily fit into that blues music box, but always with the flavour of blues underneath it," he said. "I'm really looking forward to having

the best seat in the house for Suzie's show."

Vinnick says she loves Spiegel's style as well.

"I'm excited," Vinnick said. "He's an amazing musician. We've gotten to know each other mostly over Zoom and FaceTime but he seems like a really great guy so I'm excited to hear him play and he seems like a really funny guy so that'll be fun too."

During their shows, each will play a separate set but Vinnick said they will likely come together for a few songs at the end. Since they're playing in Fort Frances on Valentine's Day there may even be a few love songs in the mix but Vinnick says she won't be sticking to that theme.

"I'll shape the set a little more to see if I can get some more love songs in there," Vinnick said. "There'll be some folks who maybe aren't in a romantic relationship, so I'll try to find songs, more about loving your fellow man and taking care of one another, that sort of thing, to make it all encompassing, maybe get a little sassy too."

Spiegel speculated that maybe the pair might do a duet at the end.

"I think it would be really nice by Valentine's Day to work out a lovely duet, because anything that adds her voice would be a blessing," he said. "I seem to find myself in Canada on lots of those kinds of days, Valentine's Day or on my birthday or Father's day, all kinds of things when I do miss home and my family so I think I'll probably need a little comfort music."

Tickets for Suzie Vinnick and Lloyd Spiegel are available at Ski's Variety, The Fort Frances Public Library Technology Centre and online via tourdefortmusic.eventbrite.ca



Having won many awards for his blues records in his native Australia Lloyd Spiegel is a talented musician and performer. He takes the stage at the Townshend Theatre on Valentine's day.

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Harbourage owner marks 25 years in restaurant industry

By Elisa Nguyen
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The Harbourage, a family-style restaurant overlooking the Rainy River, has been owned by the Bodnar family since 1999. Almost a quarter century in, current owner Edith Bodnar says she is grateful that the business has kept her busy, but that passing the torch has been in the back of her mind.

Bodnar, now 74, said her father bought the business in 1999 after retiring from his business doing drywall and plastering. She had been working full time as a nurse since 1972, which was her "chosen profession," once working as director of nursing in Emo where she was able to help people in the health care sector.

Serving customers in a restaurant was also a way to help people, Bodnar said, so when her father asked if she wanted to help run the restaurant too, she happily agreed.

"I thought, 'Sure sounds like fun.' Neither of us had any idea how to run a restaurant so it was a learning curve," she said. "When I look back on it now, it's kind of funny we decided to do it."

The restaurant name "The Harbourage" was already established when the two acquired the business. Before that, the restaurant was named "The Green Onion," Bodnar said.

Both dedicated workers, Bodnar and her father quickly adjusted to the restaurant business and found themselves enjoying the busy schedule that being business owners entailed. Working with people, she said, was one of their favorite parts.

Bodnar officially took over the business herself in 2012, after her father's passing, juggling multiple jobs until 2016 when she retired from nursing and solely focused on running the restaurant.

"I enjoyed coming here and having coffee with the guys and just going around pouring coffee for the customers. Basically, up until a few years before [my



The Harbourage has been a fixture in the community for 25 years, and a beloved stop for locals and tourists alike.

father's passing], he did all the running of it. I just did the staffing, endless grocery ordering and things like that," she said. "And that was a big change."

Ordering food, completing paperwork and scheduling staff are a few of the responsibilities Bodnar quickly learned how to do. In addition to "keeping up with the unpredictable supply chain," Bodnar also bakes home made pies for her customers.

"It's nice to see the people come in, they're happy and they're satisfied with the service. That's the reward of it all, is seeing that the people are happy and the staff are enjoying what they're doing," she said. "That makes my day."

"It's a seven-day-a-week job, that's for sure. Where if you're the owner, seven days a week, 12 hours a day. But I have a great, amazing staff. So I'm very

"That's the reward of it all, is seeing that the people are happy and the staff are enjoying what they're doing. That makes my day."

- Edith Bodnar

lucky that way," she said.

Although finding the strength to keep things running has been harder, Bodnar noted that she is not one to sit around. "I like to be busy, I enjoy it. But it's getting to be a bit challenging now as they get up in the years," she said.

When asked whether she has thought about passing on the business, she replied that it's "always" in the back of her mind.

"I will probably dwell on that very deeply," said Bodnar. It's time to relax."

Some of her favorite memories include seeing regulars at the restaurant, meeting new American tourists in the summer, and making up the menu back when the business was first starting. "Those points make it worthwhile," Bodnar said.

She also warned that working in the restaurant business is a challenge due to the supply chain, food costs and difficulty of obtaining and retaining staff.

"It's hard to make it in a restaurant. It took us three years to figure out what works and what didn't work. Learning the curves and learning what people wanted and what made the best economic decision. So it's not something you just jump into. It's a lot of hard work, a lot of dedication, and it will eat up your life," she said. "But if you've got the energy and wherewithal, you could go for it."



Bywater Call will round out the Tour de Fort season, with their soulful sound, on May 12. Advanced tickets are available at the Fort Frances Library or Ski's Variety, beside Robert Moore School. They can also be purchased online. Bywater Call recently released their second album called *Remain*. The album is available to stream on Spotify or to buy at bywatercall.com.

-Submitted photo

Bywater Call brings unique sound for last show of Tour de Fort Season

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Bywater Call will bring their soulful sounding roots and rock brand of music to the Townshend Theatre next Friday, May 12.

Meghan Parnell is one of the driving forces behind the band. She and her partner Dave Barnes do a lot of the writing work for the band. Parnell says there are several different aspects to the band.

"We would kind of call it a southern soul roots rock band," Parnell said. "There's a lot of different influences, but the soul aspect to us is really important. We have a horn section, which really affects the way our music sounds. Then with a strong female lead vocal with a lot of slide guitar. Those are all elements that make up what our full sound ends up being."

Bywater Call released their second full-length album in 2022 called *Remain*.

Parnell says the process of writing and recording the album was different than past efforts largely thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It was a strange one for us. Our first album (titled *Bywater Call* released in 2019) was really super road tested by the time we went into the studio. We had been writing and preparing for that first album and playing those tunes every chance we got," Parnell said. "For this one we had a couple of tunes written in 2020, to take on the road with us on our first kind of big tour that we did in January and February of 2020."

Then the pandemic hit, leaving Parnell and Barnes largely uninspired for a while.

"As it dragged on we were like 'We gotta get this rolling again,'" Parnell said. "It was a lot of Dave and I sitting in isolation in our backyard throwing ideas back and forth ... Then there wasn't a lot of opportunity to play the tunes for live audiences before we went to the studio, so that felt very different for us."

Parnell says the album sees a lot of inspiration from those days spent in the backyard in

the lyrics of the album.

Since COVID restrictions have been mostly lifted since last spring, the band has been going strong taking the music on the road across the world. They did two European tours last year, and got into the United States for the first time as well as hitting a number of Canadian festivals and other venues.

The band is a seven-piece group with Parnell on lead vocals accompanied by Barnes on guitar, Mike Meusel on bass, Bruce McCarthy on drums, Stephen Dyte on Trumpet, Julian Nalli on tenor sax, and Alan Zematis on keys. They will be hitting several venues in the northwest on a small tour through Red Lake, Kenora, Fort Frances, and Thunder Bay.

Bywater Call plays the Townshend Theatre wrapping up the '22-'23 Tour de Fort calendar on May 12. Tickets are available through the Tour de Fort Eventbrite page or at the Fort Frances Public Library Technology Centre or Ski's Variety.



Traditional-Style Bentley Offers Luxurious Yet Comfortable Floor Plan

By Associated Designs

The 4901 square foot single level Bentley home design offers the perfect mix of formal and informal gathering spaces, making it the ideal home for any family looking for comfort, luxury, and functionality. As you enter through the foyer, you will be greeted by a spacious formal dining room to your right and a formal living room to your left, which could double as a media room or study.

The heart of the home lies in the informal family room that is centrally located, providing easy access to all areas of the house. With its open floor plan, the family room seamlessly flows into the kitchen and breakfast nook, creating a perfect space for

entertaining guests or spending quality time with family. The kitchen features top-of-the-line appliances, custom cabinetry, and a large center island that is perfect for preparing meals.

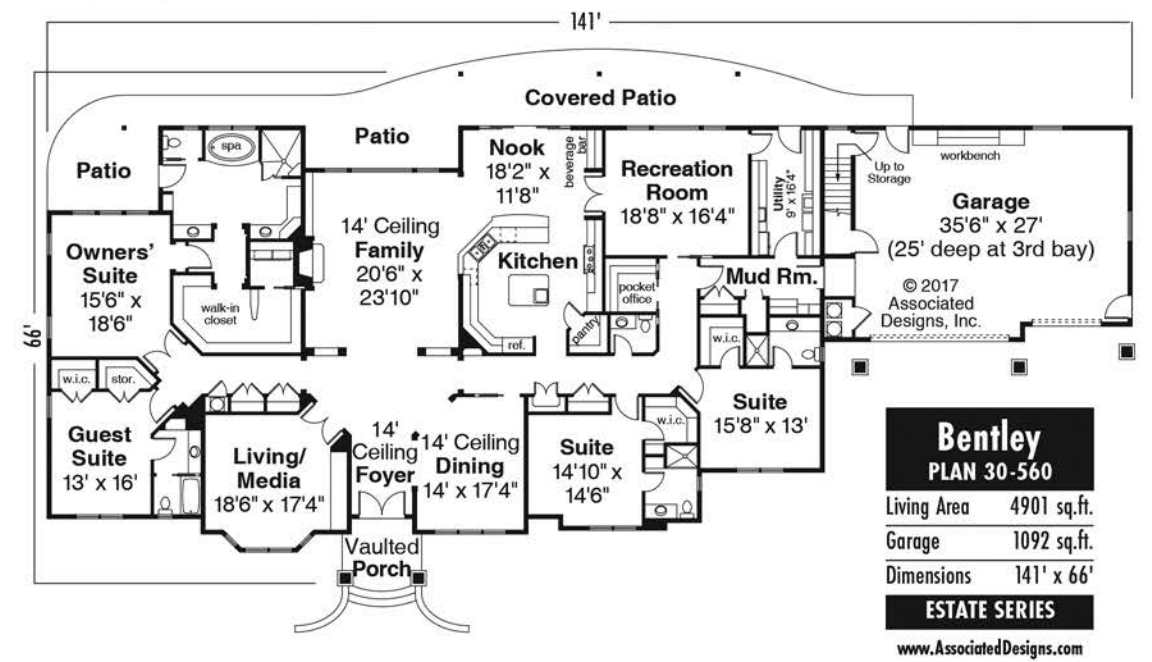
The left side of the floor plan includes two bedrooms, including the luxurious master suite with an en-suite bathroom that features a spacious shower, a soaking tub, and dual vanities. The master suite also boasts a private patio that overlooks the beautiful backyard, providing the perfect place to relax and unwind after a long day. The guest suite on this side of the home is equally luxurious, featuring a double step-in closet and a private bathroom.

On the right side of the floor plan, you will find two additional bedroom suites, each with its own

private bathroom, as well as a recreation room that provides the perfect space for games, hobbies, or simply relaxing. A mud room connects the home to the attached 3 car garage, providing ample storage space for cars and other items.

This home is perfect for families who love to entertain and spend time together, offering the perfect blend of formal and informal gathering spaces. With its luxurious features, high-end finishes, and attention to detail, this home is sure to impress even the most discerning homebuyers.

The Bentley 30-560 is created by Associated Designs, Inc.'s talented team of residential home designers. To learn more about this design visit www.AssociatedDesigns.com.



Trivia test by Fifi Rodriguez

1. GEOGRAPHY: How many U.S. states border Canada?
2. THEATER: The musical "My Fair Lady" is based on which play?
3. SCIENCE: Who was the first person to win Nobel prizes in two different sciences?
4. MOVIES: Which 1997 movie featured a character named Jack Dawson?
5. TELEVISION: What is the name of Ross's pet monkey in "Friends"?
6. LANGUAGE: How many languages exist worldwide?
7. FOOD & DRINK: Which country produces Manchego cheese?
8. GENERAL KNOWLEDGE: How many track and field events are in a decathlon?
9. U.S. PRESIDENTS: Which president had the most children?
10. MUSIC: What is the title of Britney Spears' first album?

Answers

1. 13.
2. "Pygmalion," by George Bernard Shaw.
3. Marie Curie, physics and chemistry.
4. "Titanic."
5. Marcel.
6. More than 7,000.
7. Spain.
8. 10.
9. John Tyler, who fathered 15 children.
10. "... Baby One More Time."

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top 10 movies

1. **The Super Mario Bros. Movie** (PG) Chris Pratt, Anya Taylor-Joy
2. **Evil Dead Rise** (R) Mirabai Pease, Richard Crouchley
3. **The Covenant** (R) Jake Gyllenhaal, Dar Salim
4. **John Wick: Chapter 4** (R) Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne
5. **Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves** (PG-13) Chris Pine, Michelle Rodriguez
6. **Air** (R) Matt Damon, Jason Bateman
7. **The Pope's Exorcist** (R) Russell Crowe, Daniel Zovatto
8. **Renfield** (R) Nicholas Hoult, Nicolas Cage
9. **Beau Is Afraid** (R) Joaquin Phoenix, Patti LuPone
10. **Suzume** (PG) Nanoka Hara, Hokuto Matsumura

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Upcoming Tour de Fort line-up

- May 12
Bywater Call
- July 20
Skye Wallace & Goodnight Sunrise (Canadian Bass Championship Dance party)

2023-24 Passport Series

Passports on sale now

- Sep. 20
The Rowdymen
- October 19
Sultans of String
- Nov. 7
Steven Page
- January 19
Belle Plaine
- April 8
The Johnny Max Band & The Weber Brothers
- April 30
Angelique Francis



The Rowdymen will be launching the 30th annual season of the Tour de Fort concert series. The maritime-based trio is well known for their roles in the Toronto production of the hit Broadway musical "Come From Away." They take the stage of Townshend Theatre on Wednesday, September 20. - Submitted photo

Getting rowdy for 30 years of Tour de Fort

By Allan Bradbury
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On Sept. 20 the Tour de Fort entertainment series kicks off its 30th annual season with The Rowdymen, a trio that finds its roots in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Toronto company of the hit Broadway musical 'Come From Away.'

The band is made up of Newfoundlanders Gerry Finn, and Greg Hawco and 'come from away' George Masswohl. Come from away is a term Newfoundlanders use to refer to people not from the province. Ironically, Masswohl is the only member of the band who currently resides in NL on a full-time basis, while Hawco and Finn both ply their trades on the mainland in Ontario.

According to his band bio, Hawco is a multi-instrumentalist and singer with the group. Hawco is a native of Bell Island, NL, has done a lot of composing for TV and movies. His compositions can be heard on TV shows like 'Republic of Doyle' and 'Caught.' He has also had his classical compositions performed around the world in Poland, Australia and the U.S. He also performed as the percussionist on stage at 'Come From Away' in Toronto.

Gerry Finn, who plays guitar and sings is originally from St. John's, NL and has spent parts of the last 30 years touring the world playing music with a variety of different bands and solo. Acts he's toured, recorded or been on stage with include Burton Cummings, David Usher and The Carpet Frogs, among others. He's received multiple gold and platinum record awards and had three Juno Award nominations with one win.

George Masswohl, from St. Catharines, Ont., has won awards for his acting and singing. Masswohl has been seen on stage at the Stratford, Shaw and Charlottetown theatre festivals. He has also worked with multiple Broadway touring shows across North America, and he starred as Gander Mayor Claude Elliott in the Canadian company of 'Come From Away.'

The Times connected with Masswohl from St. John's and he talked about the formation of the band.

"I was asked to come here to work for the opera company," Masswohl said. "I'd never been here before and like most Ontarians probably didn't know a whole lot about Newfoundland. I was here for a month, and within the first couple of hours of being here I met my (now) partner Deleen and she kept me coming back. Then the next year I was cast in 'Come From Away' in Toronto which is all about Newfoundland. So my whole life became about Newfoundland at that point."

Masswohl now resides in

the St. John's neighbourhood of Georgestown which is considered one of the oldest neighbourhoods in the oldest city in North America.

Masswohl and Hawco met when they both performed in the Toronto production of Broadway hit 'Come From Away.' A musical about the time passengers were stranded in the small town of Gander, Newfoundland after air traffic was grounded following the 9/11 terror attacks in 2001.

"Greg and I were getting up at 'Come From Away' charity events and doing a couple Irish tunes here and there, a cappella and people were loving it," Masswohl said. "So I said to him, 'we should take advantage of this, opportunity, 'Come From Away' is going to close one day and we can do something that keeps sharing the spirit of 'Come From Away' and the music of Newfoundland with people who have been turned on to it by 'Come From Away.'"

As it turned out Hawco had shared similar sentiments with Finn and he introduced his mutual friends.

"I didn't know Gerry at all," Masswohl said. "So Greg brings Gerry by my condo in Toronto, then the three of us got in a van and went over to the office of Steve Butler at Paquin Entertainment and they had grown up with Steve and Steve was like, 'I love, I like this project, let's work on it.'"

The trio started working together and eventually put on a show for 1000 people at the Toronto Convention Centre... in March of 2020.

After being locked down for some time, the group eventually started getting together physically distanced in Masswohl's backyard to put together a repertoire for the band.

Eventually, they were invited by the owner of an Irish pub (formerly called Dora Keogh), originally from Newfoundland, in the Toronto area to rehearse as the pub was closed due to the pandemic.

"We rehearsed five days a week for the summer of 2020," Masswohl said. "So we got really tight, and we wrote some music and really developed our show there."

From rehearsing at the pub the group put on a live stream and then was able to take the show on the road as things opened up that fall. They also brought their show back to Newfoundland and were even invited to perform for the province's Lieutenant-Governor.

The only recorded music the band has released to this point is a song called Bell Island Pony, about a horse used in the iron ore mines of Bell Island, a small island off the coast near St. John's.

The band will soon be releasing an album recorded over a few days in August in the Quidi Vidi (pronounced

'kiddy viddy') neighbourhood of St. John's.

Their show consists of a variety of music, Masswohl says.

"We say we're a Newfoundland band, playing traditional, contemporary and original music," he said. "We'll play some traditional songs that people will know but we also play some lesser known songs. We have a few Ron Hynes tunes. In fact we're debuting a Ron Hynes tune that

was never recorded."

Masswohl says the group's expertise at their crafts makes for a good show.

"I think (audiences) can expect fun, they can expect to laugh a lot because we've got a pretty good little stage show put together," he said. "They can expect great music, the musicianship in I'm the singer, but Gerry is regarded as one of the finest guitar players to come out of Newfoundland

in a long time, and Greg is a classically trained musician who has his own orchestra in Toronto. So we've got a pretty solid pedigree as a band and I've been singing my entire life. But we're really passionate about the music and about Newfoundland, so people can expect to really get a taste of Newfoundlandia from our show. It's a good concert. It's moving in many ways. And it's funny in many ways, and

it's just straight ahead, awesome music in every way."

The Rowdymen take the stage at the Townshend Theatre at 7:30 p.m. on Sept. 20. Passports for this season are on sale for \$150 at Ski's Variety, the Fort Frances Public Library Technology Centre or online via tourdefort.com.

The 2023-04 Tour de Fort line-up

Your Passport gives you access - and a guaranteed seat - to all of the shows offered this year. Individual tickets may be available, but without a passport, you may lose out. Passports are available at Ski's Variety or the Fort Frances Public Library Technology Centre.



Sultans of String - October 19



Belle Plaine - January 19, 2024



The Johnny Max Band and The Weber Brothers - April 8, 2024



Steven Page - November 7



Angelique Francis - April 30, 2024

