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Guitarist finds way back to the stage

By KRISTIN FRONEMAN

Vernon Morning Star Staff 9/18/2004

"Hey, come on in, I have a new tune to play for you." That's how Chris Madsen often greets visitors who venture through the doors of his Vernon music studio these days. Reaching for one of his Larrivee steel string guitars, he plays the as-of-yet unnamed tune. It's a flowing piece - the open lower strings resonate the bass line as Madsen's fingers meander up the neck, hammering and pulling on the strings to play the melody. He ends the tune in a ringing harmonic.

The song marks a new beginning to what has been a lifelong pursuit in music.

"I've experienced huge inner growth the past two years because of major lifestyle changes. I've been writing a lot of songs," said the guitarist.

And he isn't kidding. This past year, Madsen has penned enough tunes to fill three full-length CDs, which he hopes to produce someday in the near future. His last CD, *Over the Years*, was released two years ago.

Known primarily as a teacher, Madsen is ready to test out this new repertoire on a broader audience. He will give his first solo concert in more than a year when he presents *Guitar on Fire* at the Vernon Performing Arts Centre, Sept. 24.

To organize all this new work, Madsen has classified his music into three categories.

There's his own version of the blues, where his vocals come in to play. And since he admits to being a sentimentalist at heart, there are also romantic songs. Then there's the instrumental guitar he describes as eclectic and intimate.

"They portray moments and break new ground instrumentally," he explained. "I use different tunings. It's a whole genre developed by a few artists who haven't gone to form. You have to have a strong command of the instrument to embark on these instrumentals." Madsen has been immersed in music for more than 30 years.

Originally from the coast, he has operated his own music school in Vernon's Alpine Centre for more than a decade. The school currently houses 14 teachers and more than 350 students. Madsen is also the founder of an Internet music education site, the Music Educators Institute (MEI), which offers online credit fine arts courses for students in Grade 8 through 12 across Canada. He has also written 15 method books.

"All I've ever done is music. I've taught and performed for 33 years and all my income has been derived from music," he said.

"I learned to like Kraft Dinner in the beginning, and now I'm enjoying Dijon," he laughs, referring to his success and that Barenaked Ladies song, *If I had a Million Dollars*. Well, he's not exactly a millionaire, but music has given him a fulfilling life.

Madsen made his mark in the music industry when Yamaha International and adjudicators from the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto voted him as the most

advanced guitarist when he was 24 years old, playing coffee houses in Vancouver and absorbing everything around him.

In 1973, Yamaha hired him to head up the company's course development, seminars and workshops for guitar teachers around the country. Madsen also took charge of the guitar department at the Yamaha school in Vancouver, and found himself on bigger stages such as the Queen Elizabeth Theatre.

"That started it all. I went from not much to going insanely busy playing guitar non-stop," he said. However, the hustle and bustle started to tire Madsen, so he and his wife packed up their belongings and moved to the country outside Vernon.

"I decided I wanted the country lifestyle and wanted to get out of the city. The music industry had awarded us enough to do so," he said. "I didn't know a soul when we bought the property in the country. It was our dream. We had horses and raised our two kids. That was my life, exactly what I wanted."

Music also called the guitarist and he started giving lessons shortly after moving to the area. "I didn't anticipate it growing so much. I was pleased because in that environment, it allowed me to grow musically outside the hectic pace of Vancouver. I had a place for studying and practising without being judged." Madsen has limited his public performances to once a year. Most of his concerts are for charity causes, such as when he held the Tribute to Cammy LaFleur after the Vernon street nurse died two years ago. Those purchasing tickets for his Sept. 24 concert at the Performing Arts Centre's Ticket Seller box office can designate part of their money to a selected charity, such as Hospice House, which Madsen is supporting.

Now looking at the broader picture, Madsen says he is also ready to tour and spread his music beyond the borders of his school and hometown.

"I'm not scared to get back out there," he said. "When I walk on that stage, there is no stage fright. I'm not out to prove anything or impress people. I walk on stage to share what I've been through, and I hope you like it."

The Evans Sisters, featuring locals Meg and Sally, will open for Madsen, who will perform a solo set accompanied by his five guitars. All songs will be originals except for a Muddy Waters cover, Hoochie Coochie Man.

Music Educators Institute - Personal Guitar Program - [Cached Version]

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The Personal Guitar Program was designed by Chris Madsen. Chris is not only an accomplished Guitar player, but has written many Guitar Books, does consulting for music schools, and currently owns and operates a large music school in the Okanagan Valley in Vernon, British Columbia. Chris is also a director of the Music Educators Institute.

Chris Madsen is the recipient of many awards, including:

The Distinguished Teacher Award for Canada (1982)
National Performance Award for Guitar Teachers (1980)
One of the founders of the Yamaha Canada Music Program for Guitar