

King artist, society keep folk music alive

By Mark Pavilons

For Mary Bennet, it all started with an acoustic guitar, fueled by passion.

Instead of pigeon-holing her style, Bennet is more of a storyteller, a "roots" musician.

The King woman felt the calling early on.

"The first time I heard Emmylou Harris I realized I had a passion to make music. Other influences include Joni Mitchell, John Prine and Neil Young. I bought a guitar and a friend taught me a few chords. I met some women at a bluegrass festival and we formed a band, just for fun, though I was a shy, reluctant performer."

When a couple of the band members moved to B.C. it came to an end. Bennet said her children were born soon after and for years, her life revolved around her kids and children's music.

As her children grew, she was compelled to get back into playing with others again. Bennet immersed herself in music about 12 years ago. She joined local song circles, and went to music camps. While taking classes in North Carolina with Janis Ian, she learned to play clawhammer banjo; studied music theory; did some songwriting and worked on overcoming her stage fright.

"Singing harmony is my greatest passion. I have performed in a few different groups along the way and am now a member of a band called Churchville Park. I finally recorded my own CD, which was a fun learning experience."

One of her favourite activities is to share music on a weekly basis with members of a local community for intellectually disabled adults.

Her sound is folk, acoustic roots music, traditional or contemporary.

Mary Bennet's love of music is evident in the soulfulness of her voice. Ethereal, angelic, rich and pure are just some of the ways in which her sound has been described. Mary has performed at music festivals in Ontario and British Columbia, Hugh's Room and other venues in the Toronto area, and at the renowned Bluebird Cafe in Nashville. Along the way, she has been the opening guest for Stephen Fearing, Valdy, David Francey, Tiller's Folley, and has shared the stage with Russell deCarle, among others. She also regularly contributes harmony vocals for various recording projects by fellow artists, and shares her gift of song with residents at a local homeless shelter. Mary plays guitar, piano, clawhammer banjo and autoharp. She delights in the richness of singing in two or three-part harmony.

Bennet was instrumental in launching the Newmarket Folk Society, which began as a weekend street festival about a dozen years ago. It soon evolved into a concert series.

The group presents roughly five shows per year, with a variety of some blues and east or west coast music, male and female performers. About once a year they host a tribute concert, featuring mostly local performers.

"I love to be around music and musicians. I get to spend time with talented people I admire and support musicians at the same time. Folk/roots musicians are the nicest people!"

The concert series works well and has a loyal following.

This past October, they presented a Neil Young tribute, featuring all local performers (including Bennet).

The group is a non-profit, volunteer-run organization. The Newmarket Folk Society will present the following upcoming shows, all at the Royal Canadian Legion, 707 Strigley Street, Newmarket:

Jan. 20, 2018 ? Betty & The Bobs.

March 3, 2018 ? Lance Anderson's Blues and Gospel.

April 21, 2018 ? Dave Gunning and J.P. Cormier.

For more visit their website at <https://newmarketfolksociety.wordpress.com/>

All concerts start at 8 pm unless otherwise stated. Ticket prices may vary so check the home page for the ticket price of the upcoming concert. Tickets can be purchased from Books, Café and Things at 208 Main St. South in Newmarket, by E-Transfer to newmarketfolk@gmail.com or by phone with a credit card at 905-473-3175 (ask for Randy).