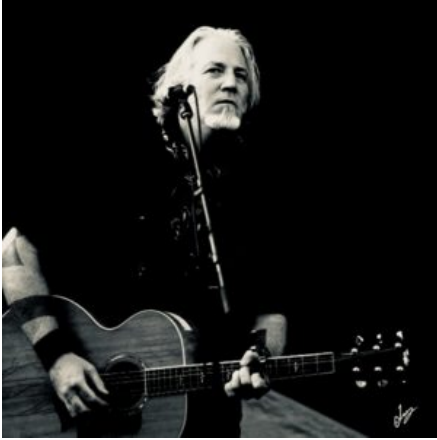


Singer-songwriter Brooks contemplates life

By Mark Pavilons



What most of us miss, Jon Brooks exposes.

The accomplished singer-songwriter is more like a modern day standup philosopher, documenting the times. He's a combination of George Carlin and Leonard Cohen.

That combination is perfect when it comes to creating contemporary music.

The King City native will return to his roots, with an upcoming performance Friday, Oct. 19 at Rockford's in King City. Show time is 8 p.m.

Brooks is a deep thinker and likes to totally immerse himself in his art. He recently spent northern Adirondacks learning songs by Van Morrison, Blind Willie Johnson, and Leonard Cohen in a 100-year-old country church he rented for rehearsing/writing new things.

Brooks is the only person nominated five times for Songwriter of the Year at the Canadian Folk Music Awards.

His sixth album, "No One Travels Alone," is a journey into life's deep, deep questions. It's as meditative as it is playful. He borrowed from Elizabethan sonneteers to connect songs in No One Travels Alone in corona form, where the last line of the first song becomes the first line of the second song, and so on, until the last line of the album completes the circle and begins the album anew.

"This album takes an ecocentric view of ourselves within the universe. We are all connected, as reflected by the connected songs in the corona form."

In 2010 he won the New Folk Award at The Kerrville (Texas) Folk Festival, one of the largest and most prestigious folk festivals in the U.S. He has toured in every province and most states this side of California.

Brooks's talent emerged early and he said he found he a talent for humour and language in his teens. But, he didn't think he was "wired" for musical talent and the confidence that comes with performing.

Music kept calling and it's been part of who he is. It has nagged him and taunted him at times, forever challenging his preconceptions.

"It's a rare and good day when I feel like I'm in command of my musical 'gifts,'" he said.

Brooks doesn't want to single out particular musical influences, but he's quite fond of artists like Cave, Cohen, Cash, and The Clash. In his case, though, one of his early influences was his dad Jack, who played drums in the 1970s. It seems early childhood memories embed themselves in our hearts. He recalls fondly hearing "Kris Kristofferson and Willie Nelson in the back seat of a Mercury Monarch on our way to hockey games in Nobleton and Schomberg and Beeton and Oro."

Brooks also doesn't want to be pigeon-holed, fitting neatly into one particular genre.

Literary influences abound in his music, which meanders through British pop, California hip hop, Texas blues, near Eastern Sufi, or Americana alt-country. He writes "topical ballads" and plays the acoustic guitar, often performing solo.

"I've always been drawn to songs that are subversive - songs that might challenge people's views, songs that make us think. I've

always been drawn into any art form that makes me think.?

Brooks observed that most of us want to feel transformed by a song, a play, a novel, a movie.

Admittedly ?anti-genre,? Brooks said he likens himself your ?punk rock uncle? living on the fringes.

He's ?sonically dynamic, lyrically provocative, and musically iconoclastic.

?My songs are morally ambiguous, never black and white. I write songs in the effort to calm those who've looked into their hearts; I also write songs to terrify those who've not. Mine is a hope unmolested by delusion and childish idealism.?

Yes, he goes where few venture, into the dark recesses of the human beast. And yet, he's engaging, encouraging his audiences to laugh, be inspired and remain hopeful.

Unlike traditional ?protest artists,??Brooks doesn't preach, take sides, or tell anyone how to think or vote.

?I prefer to sing the song of the individual ? the person sitting next to us.?

And like his newest album, Brooks wants people to feel less alone.

Brooks's repertoire is as varied as people on the planet.

In 2007 he released an album of Canadian war stories, ?Ours and the Shepherds.? In 2009, he released, ?Moth Nor Rust,? an album of songs about all the positive things that make us human, that neither moth nor rust can touch. ?Delicate Cages? in 2012 was a collection of songs all about the paradoxes of freedom and imprisonment. He followed that in 2014 when he took a provocative turn down the ?dirt roads of rural Canadian murder ballads.??This may have actually been his most folk-like album, but it contains as much humour as it does carnage.

?I'm always looking write songs that make others feel the pulse of the soul of the age.?

When performing live, Brooks enjoys the power to unite people, to be able to ?participate in something so positive in a world stuffed with negatives.

?Unlike any other art form, song has the capacity to move us with the greatest shock, and gentlest consolation. Live music is ancient and magical.?

Society is currently dealing with alienation, dislocation social media and ?fake news,?? further segregating one another.

?Aside from deleting our Facebook and Instagram accounts, the next best thing we can do for each other and our children's children's children is to continue to support local community and live music,? he said.

Despite its shortcomings, the digital and global age has given us more great music than we could possibly absorb.

And that's a good thing for those looking for a bit more from their contemporary music.

Brooks isn't quite sure what the universe has in store for him in the future.?Whatever that is, you can bet he'll have something to say about it!

For some food for thought, visit his website, jonbrooks.ca