

Garrett Mason chats about sex, drugs, and – well – the blues



Garrett Mason and the Vibrations will play at the James Joyce Pub in Fredericton on Jan 19

Not “just a man”, Garrett Mason is taking over the Maritimes with his own version of the blues

by Ashley Bursley

Garrett Mason, son of Nova Scotian and legendary blues artist Garrett Mason, dove into the world of music when he was four years old, picking up a one-string guitar and plucking a few tunes (including “Hit the Road, Jack”). Although he has only been playing live shows since 2000, he’s already taken home quite a few awards, including the Juno Award for Best Blues Album, the Maple Blues Award for New Artist of the Year, and the Canadian Independent Award for Favourite Blues Artist. He released his debut album, “I’m Just a Man,” in 2005, and is working on a second studio album to be released early this year. After countless shows, including a regular stint at the Harvest Jazz and Blues Festival, he’s heading back to Fredericton on January 19 to play at the James Joyce Pub.

B: So tell me about Harvest Jazz and Blues. You’ve played it quite a few times, right?

GM: Yeah, like the last five or six years. Really good people, and people I’ve grown up with and learned a lot from musically, and I get to play with them and see lots of bands.

B: So did you always like blues music?

GM: Actually, I kinda didn’t like it

for a period of my life. When I was younger, I hated it because my dad used to always crank it on the stereo full tilt and it bugged me because it was shoved in my face. When you’re a kid you don’t want to like what your parents like. I was heavy into punk and heavy metal and rap and stuff. But once I started listening to blues on my own time, I got a real appreciation for it.

B: Punk? Metal?

GM: Yeah, like Black Sabbath, I love BS, one of my favorite bands. I was really into Pantera, and a lot of heavy metal. Anthrax for some reason, I got right into them. I had all their albums, and I couldn’t even name you one of their tunes now. Totally erased from my mind. When Green Day came on the scene, I got really into them and I was involved in all that shit, like Weezer’s first album and Offspring’s first album. I was really into that. But then all of those bands put out their second albums, and they all kinda sucked.

B: So what are you listening to now?

GM: Blues, and funk, and soul, and jazz, and occasionally a little hip hop, rap, and stuff. But I’d say blues, funk, and soul are the main things, and jazz, too. Lately I’ve been really into Sly and the Family Stone and Albert King, Eddie Floyd, Al Green big time, and always into Jimi Hendrix. I just go through these little phases.

B: You played with B.B. King a while back, too. What was that like?

GM: Opening up for B.B. King was probably the biggest gig besides playing at my buddy’s funeral. It was one of the biggest gigs of my life. The place we played was so big and so nice, and so many people there, it was a weird kind of high-profile vibe. It was Montreal in Place des Arts. It’s amazing. It’s something else. It was funny. We – it’s

kinda embarrassing, we played the gig and we were loading out all of our gear after the show and all these people are waiting at the door to see B.B. and here we are coming through with our amps and stuff. The next night we played at a smoked-meat restaurant in Montreal.

B: What do you think of Montreal?

GM: I like Montreal quite a bit. I didn’t really like it the first time I was there because I had a bad experience. They appreciate [the music] a lot, they pay attention to it more, they respect it more than, say somewhere like Toronto. Alberta was really good for people liking blues and stuff. Montreal and Quebec really have an appreciation for the arts and music.

B: What about the Maritimes?

GM: Nova Scotia’s a good vibe because I find more people dance here and stuff, and that’s good. It’s weird. It’s always up and down. We’ll play one place and people will love it and they’ll be clapping, and we’ll play another place and no one will even clap between songs because everyone is talking to each other... People come out sometimes because they know other people will be there. It’s a big socialization thing, they aren’t really focused on the music as much, and it’s because we’re from here and people are getting bored. Maybe, you know. But when we go to another place, people have never seen us before and really want to listen to what we say.

And Fredericton’s always good. Everytime we play at the Harvest, it’s great.

B: So you’re headed down a competition in Tennessee pretty soon. What’s that like?

GM: It’s the International Blues Challenge, in Memphis, and the Harvest Jazz is sponsoring us to go down there. They awarded it to us and said,

“We’re gonna send you down there and pay for your flights and put you in this thing,” and I think it’s gonna be great to see Memphis. It’s like a battle of the bands for blues bands all over the world. It’s kind of cool. I’m not too into the whole music as a competition thing, I think that’s kind of stupid, but it’s a friendly competition to get noticed... and January too, good to get out of the cold weather.

B: So say you weren’t playing music. What would you be doing?

GM: I would probably be a porn star or something. [Laughs.] No, I don’t know. I’d like to be but I don’t think I have the credentials. To be honest, I think I’d be in a lot of trouble, a bad guy, doing drugs and stuff. Music is the only thing that keeps me away from drugs and stuff.

I used to do all that stuff and noticed it was affecting my music and picked music to be my number one and left it all behind. When I first started smoking pot as a kid, all I could do was listen to music. I smoked pot all the time and played, actually, I only did it twice, and I thought I was doing good. And then I looked at all these older guys who need it to play and it becomes a hindrance. And I was like, I don’t want to be like that.

B: So what’s next?

GM: I’ve got an album coming out in February, if all goes well. It’s been a long time in the making. I’ll be excited just to get it out and call it a package.

B: Is there anything you’d like to say to Fredericton?

GM: A wrestling speech or something, but I don’t know. Everybody come on out and have a good time. Whatever I say, I’m sure it’s going to be corny. I want everybody to put on their dancing shoes. [Laughs.] You don’t have to put that in there.

Our own Corner Gas

A new program in New Brunswick looks to fill the gaps in the local film industry

by Ashley Bursley

According to Tony Sekulich, Fredericton is poised to become the next big thing in the film industry.

Sekulich, the director of Curriculum Development for the New Brunswick Film Co-op, is also the head writer and producer of a new series of short films, “Diplomatic Relations,” which will be co-produced with John Christenson, will feature four 20-minute films, all taking place over the span of an evening in a 24-hour restaurant.

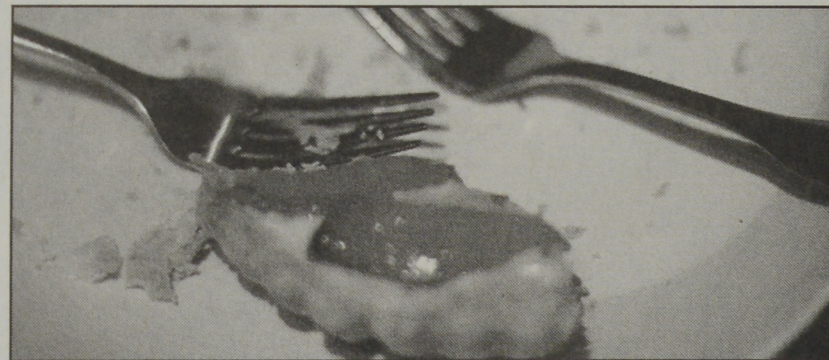
The film gives a nod to Fredericton’s hyper-popular after-hours dinner place, The Diplomat, which also served as the initial in-point in brainstorming for plot ideas.

“It’s kind of funny,” says Sekulich. “I was talking to a friend of mine who’s actually involved with the project, a writer and filmmaker himself, and he would tell me these stories about his adventures out on the town. I noticed that all his stories ended up with, ‘...so we were really hammered and ended up back at the Dip.’”

It’s a 24-hour-restaurant that’s a magnet for the creatures of the night. Anybody in the city knows [the restaurant in the film] is a wink to the Dip, even though the design and [everything else] aren’t going to be anything like the Diplomat.

“It’s just almost like the concept of this 24-hour restaurant that tends to be this magnet for the odd and the bizarre and the dramatic late, late, late at night.”

The film itself is a brainchild of Sekulich, but it ultimately serves a higher purpose. Along with a variety of workshops, including one last year with famed director of photography, George Hoseney, it’s part of the inaugural Certificate Program in Film and Television, put



The new Certificate in Film and TV will get a headstart with a series of shorts, based in a late-night diner in New Brunswick

together by the Film Co-op, NB Film, and the provincial government.

Sekulich says the impetus behind the idea of the program stemmed from a necessity within the province to fill gaps in film crew needs in New Brunswick.

“The hindrance of bringing people in is when people scout it, they say it’s beautiful and fantastic but there are gaps in the crew list. They have to bring people in from Halifax, Montreal, Toronto,” says Sekulich. “Because [New Brunswick] has such a great tax credit which makes it cheaper to shoot here, it gets offset by bringing so many people

in from outside, so it’s not so cheap anymore. It’s hurting the industry. We need a full crew base here.”

It’s not because provincial filmmakers and crew aren’t talented; in fact, Sekulich, who won a Gemini award for his work on the CTV show “Robson Arms,” says it’s a lacking skill set – and that’s where the “classroom” part fits in.

“I know we have talent here. [Other writers across the country] aren’t smarter than we are. I’ve seen it. We have the talent here in the province to create from within and do something really, really cool.

“Whether it’s an inferiority complex or our concern of never having done it here before, there’s something here that’s holding us back. Why aren’t we creating our own ‘Corner Gas’ or ‘Trailer Park Boys’ or ‘Little Mosque [On the Prairie]?’ All these great Canadian series created about a specific place in Canada...we really need to do that.”

Diplomatic Relations, which will feature local actors and was written here, in New Brunswick, will be a real lesson for filmmakers. Although the initial plot takes place in the restaurant, it will be a challenging shoot: there will be flashbacks throughout the entire film to set the scene for each story.

And the stories range from the funny – like a bachelorette party gone horribly wrong – to the dramatic, including a romantic unrequited love story and the tale of three brothers having a late-night bite after visiting their ill father in the hospital.

Sekulich, who had a hand in penning the scripts, says it was difficult to promote the idea that New Brunswick filmmakers, writers, and actors are on par with those in bigger cities like Vancouver, Toronto, or even L.A.

“We sent these scripts out to directors and they would come in and pitch themselves to direct the pieces,” he says. “A guy from Halifax who couldn’t come down did a phone interview. We e-mailed him the four scripts and called him up. He was like... ‘I was really surprised! They were really good. I have to ask you – how did you acquire these scripts?’ And I said, ‘We wrote them.’ He kept asking, ‘no, where did you get these from? Did you get these from LA?’ And

I said, ‘No, no, we wrote them.’ He was so completely blown away, [but] it was like a backhanded compliment.”

He adds “Why does it have to come as such a surprise? To me, that, in a nutshell, is a microcosm of a bigger problem. I think it’s really important that we showcase what we can do because a lot of people aren’t expecting a lot. And there’s nothing that can kill you faster than lowered expectations.”

Shooting takes place in February and March. For more information, check out the New Brunswick Film Co-op at www.nbfilmcoop.com.

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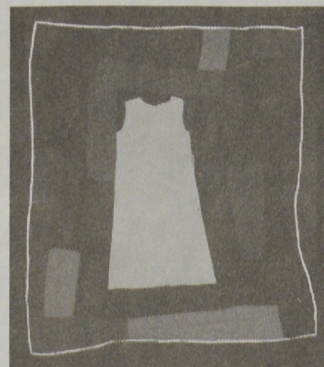
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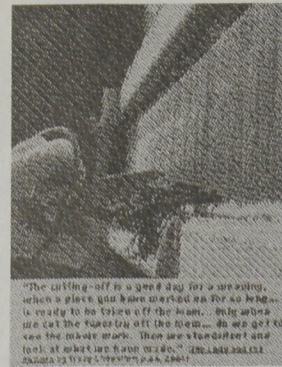
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