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## FEATURE 1

# MUSIC IN THE CITY

This city is rich with song, **FROM BLUES TO COUNTRY TO JAZZ TO FOLK TO ROCK** (and all kinds of fusions of these genres in between). The more people that discover our Kingston talent and the places they play, the better. So we thought we'd give you a sampling, an introduction to some of our **AMAZING KINGSTON TALENT.\***

BY JOSEPHINE MATYAS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY SCOTT ADAMSON



**Rueben  
deGroot**

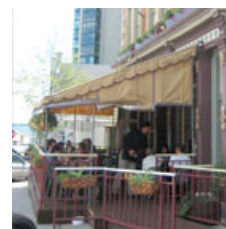
## Music Venues

From a roaring crowd at the K-Rock Centre to a small, intimate performance at the pub around the corner, Kingston is alive with music of every genre, every night of the week. To hear great homegrown talent, here are a few local venues to visit.



### The Island Grill

You have to take the Wolfe Island Ferry to get there, and it is so worth it. It's a walk-on, walk-off kind of deal (the restaurant is one block from the ferry dock), so you can skip the lineup of cars, and the view of the lake from the back patio is spectacular. Local talent is often the headliner act. 1222 Main St., Wolfe Island



### The Kingston Brewing Company

The people at the Brew Pub have deep roots in supporting local community music projects. The musical action takes place upstairs in the Dragon's Lair. Food is pub style, and they're known for their beers, wines, ciders and soda pops (products of their own microbrewery). 34 Clarence St.



**Roots.** In the three short years he's been here, this B.C. native has made a long, indelible mark on the live music scene in Kingston. Rueben deGroot has flirted with almost every genre of music around and his current mix is something he calls "grassanova . . . although swamp swing is another description that gets floated around."

"In Grade 7 or 8, my brother and I pooled our money and bought a guitar," says deGroot, smiling at the memory. "I learned all the popular radio tunes . . . whatever was in the guitar world from AC/DC to Metallica."

**Influences.** His tastes evolved somewhat when an instructor at sound school (where deGroot was training as a sound engineer) played a Lyle Lovett album. It was the influence of Lovett's unique sound that nudged deGroot towards his current preference of mixing country and jazz. At the same time, his studies were exposing him more to the sound-production side of the business and his own notes on stage "mellowed out a bit."

But it's hard to tame the urge to experiment in this musician. "If I can ram five genres into one song, it makes me very happy, and the band very frustrated," laughs deGroot.

The craftsman in him loves the sounds of the 1970s. "The '70s are the pinnacle of really lush sound productions for me," he says. "I love over-the-top horn sounds of artists like Boz Scaggs, Steely Dan and Little Feat. They've got a big, huge horns section on every tune."

**Apple Crisp.** These days, deGroot is heavily involved in the Kingston community-music collective called Apple Crisp. The group of local artists share and trade services like artwork, sound engineering and marketing, although deGroot is quick to mention "the army of other people" who pitch in by putting on shows and writing grants.

**Where you'll find him.** The Mansion at least twice each month • Westport Music Festival in mid-August • Gigging at weddings, parties and private functions



Spencer  
Evans

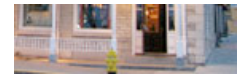
**Roots.** Spencer Evans doesn't have any qualms about the childlike joy he gets from playing music. "I was meant to be a performer from when I was a kid," he grins, "and when I'm performing, I still feel like a kid."

It's that exuberance — and a healthy dose of raw talent — that has garnered Evans the reputation as "the guy who can sing any song, any style and take any request." In addition to his regular gigs, Evans entertains everywhere from synagogues to weddings to seniors' homes, and in styles including klezmer, Celtic, Latin, jazz, soul and funk.

**Influences.** Known mainly as a keyboard player, Evans started along his musical pathway with the clarinet, an instrument he loves and still plays regularly. Studying classical clarinet at Queen's University opened him up to music, promotion and performing. In Grade 13, he was a shy, conservative kid from Belleville, but once exposed to the live music scene in Kingston, Evans discovered a kaleidoscope of music styles — electric psychedelic blues, rock and funk, jazz and salsa — and he has embraced them all.

For over a decade, he played thousands of gigs with the late Joe Chithalen, who played upright and electric bass with everybody in town . . . and was loved by everybody. Evans describes Chithalen as "a mover and a shaker" and an obvious source of inspiration who left a weighty musical footprint on the city.

For Evans, it's been one long stream of music. He still loves the clarinet and the piano, and he still plays with the joyful abandon of a kid. "Essentially 20 years down the road, my life hasn't changed that much."



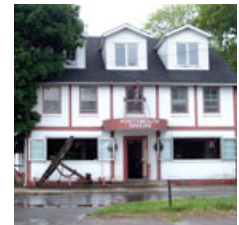
#### Tir nan Óg

Located in the historic Prince George Hotel, this authentic Irish-style pub boasts cosy surroundings and a small stage area that hosts a wide variety of bands with some serious chops from classic rock and roll to blues and the occasional Celtic tune. Order a pint of Guinness and enjoy the show. 200 Ontario St.



#### Merchant Tap House

A late-night DJ and live music resonate in an authentic pub atmosphere at the foot of Princess Street. There's a large group of regulars, with good reason: 25 beers on tap, specials on most nights and live music (Trevor Walsh plays a weekly gig on Thursday nights). 6 Princess St.



#### The Portsmouth Tavern

Known fondly as "The Ports," this is the quintessential neighbourhood pub. Known for their loyal support of local sports teams, The Ports attracts a large group of regulars who enjoy the billiards table and dartboards. Rock and roll is popular on the dance floor. 96 Yonge St.



#### Raxx Bar & Grill

This cavernous billiards hall offers more than a good game of pool; Raxx also has a good stage and performance space with excellent sound and sightlines. This is a regular venue for live R&B, soul and classic-rock groups like Filet of Soul, The Firm and the ToneKats. 665 Development Dr.



#### The Toucan

Billed as Kingston's first Irish pub, The Toucan features everything from

**Where you'll find him.** The Toucan every Monday night with GhettoXpress for a lively mix of soul, funk and acid-jazz • Aboard the Island Queen with The River Cats, for afternoon cruises from May to October • The Cove in Westport every Thursday from May to October, for jazz night (now in its 13th year) • At The Kingston Brewing Company on the second Sunday afternoon of each month, where he plays a mix of blues, jazz and sweet soul with Sam Hopkins

In addition, his musical score provides the backdrop for this summer's funk-rock musical performance of The Sir John A. Macdonald Back-from-the-Dead Concert Tour. Read more about the project [here](#).



**Michael  
K. Myers**

**Roots.** Mike Myers is a sentimental guy. How else would you describe a musician who looks to Burt Bacharach for inspiration? And who has a soft spot for the first guitar he played as a teenager in the 1960s? (Yes, he still owns it — “I took my first lessons on it,” says Myers — although it’s his six-string, acoustic Guild that gets played these days.) It was that same 14-year-old who cut his chops with a first band called The Growing Pains. More than three decades later, three of the original four members reunited and reclaimed the name, and the grown-up version of The Growing Pains has been playing ’60s music and filling dance floors since 2000. Myers fronts the band with vocals and guitar.

**Style.** “I make my living playing other people’s music and I gravitate toward the jazz standards of the greats like Nat King Cole and Sinatra,” says Myers. “But I’m a serious songwriter and I do get a lot of pleasure out of recording my own songs.” His latest CD, *My Kind of Play*, is filled with touches of the classic songwriters who inspire him: Cole Porter, Rodgers and Hart, Bacharach, and Lennon and McCartney.

**Onstage.** It’s the passion for songwriting that sparked a love affair with musical theatre. In the early 1970s and ’80s, Myers worked as a musical accompanist with Theatre 5, writing and playing the songs for the troupe’s classic fairytale shows. His show tunes are still being performed, although Myers has since handed over the role of accompanist and turned his onstage energies to performing a wide range of music styles, from rock and roll to Celtic to jazz in venues that range from wedding receptions to barn dances.

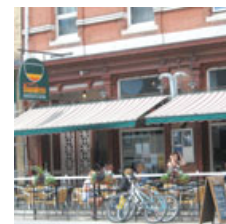
**Where you'll find him.** Performing tunes from the ’60s with The Growing Pains at local venues including Raxx Bar & Grill and Brandees • Aboard the Island Queen with The River Cats, for afternoon cruises from May to October • As part of Paddy Whack, a duo with Greg Forbes, Myers performs Celtic and Irish tunes Saturday evenings through July and August at the Stonewater Pub in Gananoque

traditional folk to up-and-coming hot bands. GhettoXpress plays soul, blues, funk and Motown every Monday night. Settle in with a pint from their on-tap selection. 76 Princess St.



#### **The RCHA Club**

Tucked away upstairs on Ontario Street, faithful fans rally at The RCHA Club (non-members are welcome with a small cover charge) to hear strains of folk, rock, pop and Celtic. 193 Ontario St.



#### **Brandees**

Every Thursday night, blues fans show up to hear one of Kingston’s greats: the wonderful blues and jazz singer Georgette Fry. But with live music Wednesday through Saturday, it’s also known as one of downtown’s most active nightspots. The large dance floor is always hopping. 178 Ontario St.



#### **The Mansion**

When the Fisher family took the helm 18 months ago, they set their sights on becoming the place in Kingston to see live music. Almost two dozen bands play each week, with performances every night. With folk, funk, Latin, jazz, acoustic, bluegrass, rock and ska, there’s a bit of everything. 506 Princess St.







## Emily Fennell

**Miss Emily.** Emily Fennell has shifted gears — sort of. Nurturing her young daughter now trumps late-night bar gigs, and the last half-year has seen the focus of her career move from the Emily Fennell Band to Miss Emily, a new solo act. But with these shifts, the Prince Edward County-born singer/songwriter still makes life onstage a priority. This is a woman so in love with music and the pleasures of performance that she has no intention of giving up the stage for a sedentary life, even at her idyllic farmhouse. “I love to belt it out,” says Fennell, a natural performer whose first stage experience goes back to the early days of childhood in a very musical household. “I’m really lucky because I am a child of the ’80s, but I don’t remember listening to too much ’80s music. In our family, we listened to a lot of soul and a lot of Motown. I found my mom’s Carole King Tapestry album and that’s the main reason I became a singer.”

**Influences.** Being surrounded by musician parents and family friends ignited a passion early in Fennell. “Music has always been my career,” she says. “I knew that from when I was five years old and I never wanted to do anything else.” Around the age of eight, Fennell started singing and stepdancing in folklorist Suzanne Pasternak’s musical operas. Over the years, the role expanded to singing backup for Pasternak and gaining oodles of experience in front of audiences. Fennell names Pasternak as a huge influence: “She hung the moon — she still does to me.”

**Style.** In addition to the Emily Fennell Band, the singer has been involved in other local bands — from Motown to jazz to country-rock. But it was a chance encounter with music manager Cliff Fabri that launched the shift to her solo act and some exposure to the biggest international labels and production companies. With Miss Emily, the focus is on the songwriter’s original material. “It’s mainly soul-rock, a lot of me on electric guitar and a lot of me on piano, which is my first instrument,” says Fennell. Fennell is chock full of spirit, reflected in her gutsy songs and her positive outlook on life. “You just never know where the road takes you.”

**Where you’ll find her.** At the Merchant Tap House • Performing at the Confederation Park live music series • The Ottawa Bluesfest in mid-July



## Trevor Walsh



### Grand Theatre

After an extensive, top-to-bottom restoration, the Grand Theatre can be described as a new theatre within a historic shell. The two theatres are full-fledged concert venues. The year-round program of music, theatre and dance includes the big names as well as local productions. 218 Princess St.

**Roots.** Ahead of the curve, Trevor Walsh was playing Celtic music “before Celtic was cool,” he says. Born into a very musical Cape Breton family, Walsh came by the genre honestly and was playing jigs and reels on the fiddle by the time he was seven. His first public performance was on The Tommy Hunter Show, which was immediately followed by a whirlwind year of touring and playing.

**Style.** The teenage craving for a “more romantic instrument” led Walsh to the guitar. In the mid-90s, he and his brother crossed Canada 11 times playing Celtic tunes as The Cape Breton Barbarians. Three years ago, he joined with bassist Rob Holly and drummer Sandy Mackenzie (“The guys that make me sound good,” says Walsh) to form The Trevor Walsh Group. “When people come to see us play, I promise them 30 concerts in one show,” says Walsh, describing the way the trio emulates a range of classic-rock bands like AC/DC, Rush and The Police. But he does miss the strains of Celtic: “Being from Cape Breton, it is never too far from me and I still throw it in.” And for a guy who admits that “All I ever wanted to do is play the guitar,” Walsh has hit his stride. He is devoted to the handcrafted Godin line from Quebec (his favourite being a double-neck, 18-string guitar).

**Inspiration.** “My mind is always looking for the stories around me to write in a song,” says Walsh, who charts his own course for inspiration. He teaches both adults and children the guitar basics, and those lessons reveal his early roots. “I teach by listening to the music, and by listening to where the chord progression goes,” says Walsh. “It’s the way I taught myself because no one had the time to teach me.”

**Where you’ll find him.** At the Merchant Tap House every Thursday night • At local clubs like Raxx Bar & Grill, Brandees and The Draught House • At community events including the ALS Walk, Canada Day celebrations and Confederation Basin concerts.



## Mauricio Montecinos

**Roots.** It was the lakes and rivers of Kingston that proved an irresistible magnet for Mauricio Montecinos. “The proximity to water reminds me of my home in the lake district of southern Chile,” he says wistfully. Montecinos emigrated from Chile to Canada in the early 1990s, and after some time in Toronto and northern Ontario, he found the right fit in the small-town feel of Kingston. “It’s easier to produce music in a small town,” he explains. “The size of the town, the lakes, the greenery allow you to breathe a bit, and to find the time to write and produce music here. My goal is to produce music here in Kingston and to eventually perform on a national basis.”

**Influences.** The youngest of nine children in a musical family, Montecinos was influenced by the Latin American folk music played by his older brothers and the gypsy-style music of his neighbours. “My soul could not stop from becoming involved. Songs and good food were a part of our home every week.” At age seven, Montecinos started to play guitar and sing; a year later he was performing onstage, playing mainly Latin, romantic boleros and gypsy music. By the time he was a teenager, he was playing lead guitar in bands covering both Latin tunes and North American rock and roll. In a homeland he describes as “one of the most culturally, musically diverse countries in the world,” Montecinos found inspiration from several different influences, including Carlos Santana and the Gypsy Kings, Italian vocalist style and flamenco guitar. It’s the fusion of these forces that comes forth in Montecinos’ Kingston-based group, the seven-piece Latin Fusion Band.

**Style.** “All of the arrangements are based on my guitar technique from Latin America,” he says, describing his instrumentally technical groove. “I expose the audiences to that finger, Spanish guitar style with a fusion to the Latin rhythms and jazz found in North American music. And I also add a fair amount of flamenco stylish guitar to the groove.”

**Where you’ll find him.** The Mansion at least once a month • Island Star cruise boat • Teaching guitar and music theory at Renaissance Music and at St. Lawrence College

\* Yes, we know about the great band/singer/musicians that you know. They're out there, playing our clubs and venues. And they are fantastic! We just couldn't fit them all in. This list is meant to whet your appetite and get you thinking about how to include a little more live music on your plate.

Discussion Closed

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