

Pristine Prisms released in the Art Gallery of Bancroft



By Jim Eadie

On the evening of March 6 the Art Gallery of Bancroft (AGB) was suddenly transformed into a hillside folk festival atmosphere for over an hour. The nearly 100 people who came to the gallery to hear Heather Inwood-Montrose and her two musical collaborators perform live selections from her newly released CD, were surrounded by the bright newly hung paintings by David Vasquez. People stood, some sat on benches and chairs while others sat on the floor almost up to the feet of the performers, and were clearly inspired by what they heard.

Pristine Prisms, the new release of 11 songs by Inwood-Montrose is a collection of her own compositions that was never intended to be a public offering until later in the projects two-year history.

In 2013, Inwood-Montrose traveled to Guatemala to participate as a volunteer in the Guatemala Stove Project, an ongoing effort to upgrade homes with cooking facilities better than indoor open wood fires. She worked as a labourer carrying bricks and mixing cement, constructing masonry stoves. "I had learned that one of the leading causes of death among women and children there is lung cancer," she said, noting that smoke from indoor cooking was responsible for the problem.

While in Guatemala, she connected with Stevie Wutnot "Bereza" and his partner Marion who were teaching school near Guatemala City. Both had previously taught school in Bancroft, and were planning on returning to their home on the Madawaska Rd. later that year. Since Wutnot and Inwood-Montrose are accomplished musicians, they agreed to get together to play a bit of music on their returns to Bancroft area.

Wutnot, who has considerable experience recording and producing music as well, ultimately collaborated on recording some of Inwood-Montrose's music in what was intended only to be a private and personal project for the songwriter.

"But as she listened to her work as it progressed, she was changing her mind," said Wutnot. "She wondered if she could get Howard Baer involved. And I think that was the turning point."

The music was all recorded, mixed and co-produced by Wutnot at his recording studio on the Madawaska Road.

"We are all very happy with the final product," he said. "It is very simple, and very elegant."

Howard Baer, a well-known local musician with worldwide acclaim as an arranger and producer jumped into the project without hesitation. In addition to having received seven Juno Award nominations with one win in 1999 in his musical career, he is revered locally as an ardent, hands on supporter and contributor to music at the community level.

In his home studio, Baer took the tracks recorded at Wutnot, layered in acoustic bass, and then mastered the final recordings.

"I love this music," he said. "It is a different direction stylistically for her. This was a fresh experience for me too, with her approach to telling life stories. They trusted me to add the bass lines that I thought felt right, and I could do that in my own studio. In that way I had lots of time to digest what I wanted to do. Steve did a great job - he was a huge part of this project."

"Songwriting for me just happens," said Inwood-Montrose. "I don't consciously sit down and decide I am going to write a song. My inspirations are often visual - I sing about my view of the world - I picture the stories that I write about. As I commute so much, often something comes to me as I am driving my car. I just pull over to the side of the road, and record on my phone what has just come to me."

Inwood-Montrose described the three collaborators on the project as "more solitary musicians" who work well in a creative space that is uncluttered.

"I told them to just enjoy the process. I didn't want the pressure of deadlines to affect the creative process," she said. "I am truly gratified for the community that I live in, and the people who support my art. Especially Stevie, and Howard."

Copies of the CD can be purchased at the Art Gallery of Bancroft.

The album can be listened to at www.YAHYoga.ca, or downloaded at heather-i-m.bandcamp.com

The "Simply Abstract" showing of David Vasquez's work will be on display at the AGB until March 28. Vasquez, who is out of the country at the moment, will present at artist's talk at the gallery on Friday, March 20 at 7:30 p.m.