

CAMERON WIGMORE

THE CLEAN, GREEN SAX MACHINE!

David Morrison

Please forgive the title: I just couldn't help myself. I know it may appear glib, but in consideration of the life journey taken by this brilliant Nanaimo musician, it is fitting. In fact, I'll qualify this further in stating that the title was borne of out of the inspiration I felt after talking to Wigmore about said journey. For here is a man who just under a decade ago was hurtling headlong into drug-fuelled oblivion, until he faced up to his addiction and committed himself to getting back on track. Today, he is a very happy man and widely regarded as one of the best, most productive and interesting musicians on Vancouver Island - so it's not difficult to be inspired by his story.

"I was nearly on the streets and going downhill pretty quickly. My life was getting progressively worse and every single day was about addiction," he says, recalling the approach of crisis point in the addiction that gripped him from his late teens until the age of 23. Now nine years clean and sober, Wigmore describes his life as "fantastic." He is married with a young son and, in pursuing a Bachelor of Music Degree at VIU, continuing to follow a

passion that started in sweet fashion at elementary school when he was 11-years old.

"I had a crush on a girl in my class," Wigmore chuckles. "She disappeared from class and I discovered that she'd joined the band. So I thought I should join the band! I came running home to my parents and said: 'I need a trumpet!' I thought it was the coolest instrument, but my dad said: 'I just happen to have a tenor saxophone!' I wasn't too thrilled about this at first, but as soon as I made my first note on it I thought it was the neatest thing ever! And I soon realised that the music overshadowed any other motivations I might have had!"

Twenty-two years later, Wigmore is truly an accomplished saxophonist. As well as playing in various kinds of bands around Nanaimo as a go-to horn player for musicians who know what's what, he has four diverse projects of his own on the go:

The Wigmore/Shipley Duo sees Wigmore team up with guitarist Brad Shipley for their take on some jazz classics. "We do original arrangements based on standard jazz repertoire," explains the sax player. "Most of it is jazz from the 50s that we've taken from the quartet setting and distilled it down to two musicians."

The Cameron Wigmore/Gillian Stone Quintet trades in "far out jazz and funky beats," delivering soulful renditions of romantic jazz standards, Brazilian Bossa Novas and stylistically compatible original material. The vivacious up-and-coming singer Stone features in other local bands of various musical persuasions, Wigmore describing her as "a real driving force" in this outfit.

The Cameron Wigmore Quartet: A Tribute to Canadian Jazz is a musical project that may well be unique. I do not know of any other combos dealing specifically in the works of contemporary Canadian jazz artists, such as Ingrid Jensen, Greg Bush and Hugh Fraser, and neither does Wigmore. But whether out on its own or not, this quartet is something he's very passionate about. "There is such a wealth of great Canadian music that's been written in the jazz idiom over the last few decades - music I've not heard performed in the general repertoire—that I really wanted to do this," he says. "The particular pieces I've selected have personal stories attached to them. Something I want to bring to the performances is to talk about the musicians, about how I've come to know them over the years, and how their music has impacted on me."



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The music of Jellycat, meanwhile, is aimed directly at the feet. Described by Wigmore as an “instrumental jam-funk band,” Jellycat performs its own funky originals and raids a diverse catalogue of dancefloor shakers from the ilk of Kool & the Gang, The Meters, Stevie Wonder, Herbie Hancock, and even Frank Zappa. “The songs we’ve chosen for covering have a deep bass groove, a funky drum beat, and a jumping off point for our collective improvisation,” Wigmore explains. “The band is made up of fantastic musicians, so it’s really a treat to be doing this project with these guys.”

So we’ve covered ‘clean’ and ‘saxophone machine,’ but what of ‘green’? Unsurprisingly, rather obviously, this refers to Wigmore’s political leanings. As familial responsibilities and the study of music occupy most of his time these days, he is more supporter and member than activist, but Wigmore has officially represented the Green Party. As he reveals, the association led directly from a lifestyle choice:

“When I was a teenager I decided to boycott McDonalds and fast food in general. It was a health decision. As I got a little older and became more aware of what was going on around me, I discovered there were simple decisions I could make that would have an impact on my footprint on the earth. Then when I was in Alberta the 39th federal election was called, and I said to my wife: ‘I don’t know what’s going on, but I want to vote.’ So I contacted the candidates of the local parties and only the Green Party replied. I met with some of the members and supporters and got to know what the policies were. It turned out they were seeking a candidate—so I decided to jump in and, just like with music, I gave it everything I had.”

Since turning his life so dramatically around by walking away from that precipice, it seems Wigmore has given everything he has in many ways. In his own words he experienced “spiritual bankruptcy” back then, but today he must be



The Cameron Wigmore/Gillian Stone Quintet plays at the Red Martini Grill, 1-75 Front St., Nanaimo on Friday April 9.

Jellycat plays at the Harewood Arms, 4-508 Eighth St., Nanaimo on Saturday April 24.

feeling very rich indeed. That he brings so much pleasure to local music fans and serves as a responsible steward of our planet on a daily basis are reasons enough to regard him a spiritual millionaire worth every buck.

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