



Sherry Smith and the Band from Glad • photo: Andrea Masyk

## SHERRY SMITH'S BAND FROM GLAD NEVER TOO OLD TO ROCK!

by David Morrison

During a lifetime of working in the music industry, as a fan and in professional capacities I have likely attended in the region of three thousand live shows. Yet on April 16, at Vancouver Island University's Malaspina Theatre, I experienced one of the most unusual and delightful of them all.

It is reasonable to assume that the audience at the average show would consist mainly of existing fans of the performers, but at this event it seemed that most every attendee of the hundreds present was either a relative or friend of someone onstage. And they were all there to witness and hail the return to live performance of the Nanaimo singer Sherry Smith, making a remarkable comeback from a lengthy and entirely necessary self-imposed exile. Indeed, it has been over three decades Smith has been away from the stage, but evidently being a woman intent on making up for lost

time, she decided it could be fun to release her debut CD – at 68-years-old - then throw a big party to launch it!

Back in the early seventies Smith fronted the popular Nanaimo-based rock band, *Rose*, whose members had relocated to the city from Missoula, Montana. When the band dissolved Smith sang in various other bands, before the wild rock 'n' roll touring life, performing in bars night after night, truly took its toll on her physical and mental health. Some challenging times and dark days followed as Smith worked to get her life back on track, meaning a total withdrawal from the music business. But after twenty years in the automotive industry she is back, older and wiser, with her Band from Glad's lovely CD, *Gardener of My Mind*, released at an age when most women have likely settled into a leisurely retirement routine.

"It's hard to find the words, but it's like having that CD out there justifies my existence," said Smith, struggling to keep her  
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emotions in check. "I'm very proud. When I first held that featuring CD in my hands, it was marvelous. I couldn't believe it, really. It's like you're finally looked at as a real musician and finally did what you had to do to stand up and be counted alongside the many other wonderful musicians in town."

It was Smith's son, *Band from Glad* drummer "Buckin'" Billy Ray Smith who served as the spark to bring *Gardener of My Mind* to fruition. "Some of the songs date back to the seventies and Billy Ray was determined that we record them for my grandkids and the incredible community that has stood by me all these years," Smith explains. "The other thing was, well... I guess you don't fully understand what your children are going through during the dark days, as they live through them. When we were recording the songs, little resentments from the past would come out, things he was feeling but didn't realize he was, so we worked through it and not only produced a piece of art together, but we healed a relationship along the way."

Featuring searing electric guitar solo contributions from Smith's long-time friend, internationally renowned blues star, David Gogo, *Gardener of My Mind* is not only a collection of personal, lyrically poetic blues-rock songs, but also a tribute to Nanaimo and its history. Images of the famous Bastion and the city's mining history adorn the CD sleeve, Smith's grandfather having worked for years in the Cassidy mines. "He taught me so very much," Smith said with pride, "and because he was an amazing gardener I like to think that he also 'gardened' my mind, hence the title."

To open the Malaspina Theatre show Smith stood alone, dressed head-to-toe in white, and on her acoustic guitar started to pick out the pretty, melancholy melody of the CD's epic closing track, Grandfather. "I listened to his fairy tales, and sat upon his knee / I felt his love for music, as he tapped incessantly..." she sang in her rich, soulful voice. It was a beautiful opening, and the already crackling atmosphere really kicked in when out walked Billy Ray, bassist Wayne Veillet and guitarist Daryl Marklinger to complete the *Band from Glad* line-up. The show went from strength to strength with all four musicians at the top of their game, Smith singing her heart out as if it was her last day on earth. As a real treat, David Gogo - fresh from touring back east - came out to guest with his trademark quicksilver playing on three songs. The audience, already going nuts, went that little bit more nuts! It was an evening of high emotion, but a lot of fun and truly a family presentation. Smith's grandson played bass in the excellent opening band, *Flipside Cinema*; her daughter-in-law took and sold tickets at the door, and her 88-year-old mother sat proudly in the audience. From my personal, local perspective, this amazing night genuinely helped to redefine the word 'community.'

"It was overwhelming, just overwhelming," Smith said of the show. "At the beginning I was shaking, because this was a big thing and there were lots of people there. Halfway through the song something just came over me and I started to relax, knowing that this was exactly where I was supposed to be at that moment in time. It began to feel like a kitchen table party,

with people feeling comfortable enough that they could yell out little comments and encouragements, so everyone was feeling the energy and participating in the evening. It made it humorous and warm, and it made us want to leave it on the floor, not knowing if we would get such an opportunity again. I shed a few tears, but not until the next day. I had to be strong and came home with a headache like you wouldn't believe, because I was so hyped up, right?"

The first CD done, dusted and on sale, and the launch show as much a big artistic statement as personal triumph, Smith is looking ahead with cautious optimism. "We're realistic in that we all have families to support, so we're just taking things as they come," she said. "But we are already planning a second CD, and as far as the future goes I think we'll just keep on doing the same thing - working up original new material and trying to get that second CD out as soon as possible. *Gardener of My Mind* was simply the result of a garage band meeting once a week for two hours over seven years, so anything's possible!"

While the irrepressible Smith is a grounded woman - eternally grateful for her lot in life, knowing that she has triumphed over adversity by making good decisions after many wrong ones in the past - she also appreciates that her story is quite something, viewed by people like me as heartwarming and life-affirming. She addresses this in saying, "I think maybe our story might serve as an inspiration or incentive that anyone can do this. Someone might have a little band like ours that meets once a week, and maybe they don't take it very seriously, even though they'd like to do something like we have. Hey, I'm 68-years-old and have just released my first CD when a lot of people wondered if I would ever make it back - so if I can, anyone can!"

*Gardener of My Mind* is available to purchase from *Fascinating Rhythm* (Nanaimo), *HMV* (Nanaimo or nationally online), and online from *Amazon*, *iTunes* and *Indiepool*. Sherry Smith and *Band from Glad* can be contacted via Facebook: [www.facebook.com/bandfromglad](http://www.facebook.com/bandfromglad). ~

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