

JJ Voss concert this Saturday in Moosomin

Lachlan Neville of Rocanville will be the opening act

Singer-Songwriter JJ Voss will be performing at the Conexus MCC Centre on Saturday, February 4, along with Lachlan Neville, Kevin Weedmark and Kara Kinna spoke to him about his career and the upcoming show. Following is the full interview.

Tell us first of all how this concert came about. Is this part of a tour?

Yes and no. I was booked in Swan River for the Friday night and I had been talking with Joel and Jarrod at the Cork & Bone Bistro a couple of times over the last couple of years, about a date that would work when I'm passing through or in the vicinity. I was heading east so I called them up and asked if we could do something together and they were happy to work out a plan.

Do you do a lot of touring and a lot of shows?

I do. Prior to the pandemic I had to take some time off from my career because I had some health issues that I had to deal with. My touring at that point had kind of ground to a halt. Then I had a new record lined up and ready to drop and it came out the same week that the whole world shut down because of Covid. It was an exercise of patience for two years not being able to do anything but I'm happy to say that after, once we were able to, there was a window in 2021 for a few months when the restrictions were off. I played quite a few shows in that window and then last year, kind of right through to the end of October I hit it pretty hard.

What was the life of a singer/songwriter like through Covid? Were you able to do much? Did you do online shows? How did that change your life?

Well the only positive spin that I can put on it is that there was never a dull moment—we'll put it that way. It was horribly frustrating and scary with the amount of preparation, time and all of the money that was invested in getting an album ready to go out the door and then to have it cut off at the kneecaps. That made me very sad, and I was also very scared because I had a lot of money on the table. But the positive in it was I had to find some way to connect with my audience and to get these songs out to the world. So I embraced the streaming thing. I had no idea what it was but instead of having a CD release show, I set up my iPhone. I duct taped it to my mic stand and we did my album release show to my Facebook on a live stream. That was the beginning. Then over the course of the next year to year and a half I was performing for live streams every couple of weeks and it kind of became its own thing.

How did you get into a career in music? There's gotta be easier ways to make a living.

It's all I ever wanted to do or knew how to do. At the time I was a kid, I grew up in Cupar and that's a pretty sports oriented town. You're either a hockey player or you're a farmer and I turned out to be neither as things went. I kind of knew at a young age. The bug bit me at a young age and I've been following it ever since.

Where has your career taken you? I know you've been getting a lot of recognition in the country music world in that last little bit.

Thank you, well for where it takes me—for me it's making a living and following my creativity and being true to myself and what I want to say through my music. I don't have management or booking agents, that type of thing. I've always been very adamant that I'm doing this for a reason and I want to do it on my own terms.

Is it just the last couple of years here that you've gotten quite a lot of recognition and a few SCMA awards?

At SCMA the members have been good to me. I think in total since I've started releasing, I've won eight awards but in the last couple of years I won four or something like that. Awards aren't my motivating factor, they aren't what get my up in the morning, but I can't lie, it does feel good when your peers give you a pat on the back and you get recognized for your work. From a business standpoint I'd be lying if I didn't say that they are very, very beneficial. It really helps to fill up your calendar with live shows.

How would you describe your show and your career right now, JJ?

That's a very tough question to answer. I've been doing it a long time and you know I'm not in my 20s anymore. I would say that I've established a very loyal fan base of people who like what I have to say in my songs



Saskatchewan singer-songwriter JJ Voss

and who the music seems to speak to and I'm very grateful for that because it allows me to make a living. So going forward I would like to expand my touring radius and my fan base and the trick with that is staying consistent and following up on the momentum that I've managed to achieve over the last few years.

Is there a bit of a buzz when you're performing live? There are some artists who say they feed off the energy of the crowd and others who say that they're up there on the stage doing their thing and they have to focus on their music and not the crowd. Which camp do you fall into?

The live music experience is all about energy exchange. It's about giving the crowd your energy and putting your heart on the line. If they reciprocate and bring it back to you, that's a conversation that you're having. Although in fairness, there are some nights where you go and sing your heart out and tell all of your best jokes and try your damndest and it doesn't feel like it's coming back to you—that definitely does happen, but there's no substitute for the energy exchange when a crowd is giving you back what you're giving to them. It feels incredible and I think that's the magic of live music. I think that's why live performance will never die.

JJ, for those who aren't super familiar with your music, your show in Moosomin—can you describe what they're going to see and what type of music they're going to hear?

I play two sets of songs and it's probably a 70/30 per cent split of my own songs and I play some covers of artists that have influenced me over the years, plus other artists that I admire or very much respect nowadays. So I try to balance it between telling my own stories and then also giving some background on what's influenced me and what has kind of created my art.

Who are some of the artists who have influenced you?

Early on Steve Earle would've been one of my biggest heroes. As songwriters Blue Rodeo, Charlie Major of course and Gordon Lightfoot. Then from a musical standpoint, because before I got into being a singer/songwriter artist, I travelled for a long time in bands. I was a guitar player as a side guy in many different bands. So then as far as learning how to play the music craft, I would say that it's from Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Blackhawk, and also Alabama to a certain degree when I was young.

How would you describe your music?

Good. Ha ha. I would say that it's a composite of a lot of the artists that I just mentioned. Obviously Steve Earle was a very big influence. When Guitar Town came out in 1986 I was 11 years old and it was that album that every character in every song on that record spoke to me. I jumped into every character on that record and it's kind of what put the hook into my cheek. It was at that point that I said, "That's what I want to do with my life."

What do you hope that your audience takes away from your show?

Well I guess number one is that I hope they're entertained. I hope that they had a

ously social media plays a huge role in that, but the world is in a very divided place and it has been for the last decade. That record was very much addressing those topics but overall it's just my experience in where I come from. I grew up on a small farm and my parents had four quarters of land. We had to work very hard and we were kind of the underdogs, it seemed. I've always had sympathy or empathy for the underdog and I guess being a Saskatchewan Roughriders fan to the core—I probably don't have to say much more.

That explains everything. Ha ha

So with the songs that I write and the music, I try to, well it's basically my take on the world through my lens.

Of the songs that you've written, is there one that you're most proud of?

Before my father passed away in 2013, I wrote a tune called "It's a Pride Thing" and I'm happy that we were able to get that song recorded and released out to the world before he passed.

My current song that I have out now is called "A Letter to Dad." Asking to choose between your songs is kind of like asking a parent to choose between their kids. It's tough to answer, but the current single is basically an update to my dad because as I said, he passed away ten years ago and we're trying as a family to keep the farm in our name. We've got the land rented out and as siblings we're trying to figure out how we can maintain this into the future. So I wrote this song basically as an update to him—so right now I would have to say that my song "A Letter to Dad" is probably one that I'm most partial to.

We were just watching the video of that one this afternoon. It's very moving. Are you looking forward to coming out to Moosomin?

I am. I haven't played in Moosomin now since probably 2013 or 2014. That's a long time ago. We played in the theatre as part of an OSAC tour with the Arts Council. We had a great crowd, over 200 people in the hall that night. We had a really good night and for whatever reason, I haven't been back so I'm really looking forward to coming back to town.

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