

MUSIC

Ryan rebuilds a church – and his career

Soul searching at Cecilia

By Dean Lisk

He calls it an enlightening process: First, rebuilding a church; then, resurrecting his music career.

“It was like an epiphany — bom-ba-bom-bom!” musician Brett Ryan said. “I am going to bring this church back to life and my music back to life.”

After taking an extended break from the music industry, Ryan — an East Coast Music Award winner — recently unveiled his latest CD, the R&B and gospel-influenced *St. Cecilia Soul*.

The album, which was released on May 31, was inspired by the musician’s experiences turning the abandoned St. Cecilia church on Purcell’s Cove Road into a music studio.

“It is a very inspiring place to work,” Ryan said, adding he originally planned to restore the building, not turn it into a recording studio. “But, it inspired me to write this record. I was writing the album basically for myself. It was the sheer enjoyment of making music again.”

He sings about the experience on the album’s title track.

We found an old abandoned church/people hardly go anymore/curiosity set in/so we pushed in the door/mercy me to my surprise/the revelations we did find / Gabriel and his trumpet descended.

“The music just came out naturally,” Ryan said, adding a mural featuring Gabriel and his trumpet was painted on the studio’s ceiling. “My music has always been, I won’t say religious, but spiritual.”

He didn’t know it at the time, but later discovered Cecilia — martyred three days after a botched beheading in 230 — is the patron saint of musicians.

Don’t know what’s come over me / some kind of epiphany / been gone for so long / something missing something wrong / I wanna get back to the music. (from the song *Back to the Music*).

Big hit

“When I was younger, I had a romantic vision of the music industry,” Ryan said. He got his start busking on the streets of Halifax on Friday and Saturday nights. He would hang out on Argyle Street, strumming old Bob Dylan and Van Morrison songs.

“I would go home with a suitcase full of nickels.”

He played music as part of a group called Little Ministers during the ’80s, before launching his own solo career with *The Answer’s Electric* in 1991. The title single made the top 20 in Canada and Top



Brett Ryan says he returned to the music business for the sheer joy of writing songs and making music.

10 in Belgium, Holland, Australia and Japan. He took home male artist of the year honours at the ECMAs.

Ryan says he soon saw the writing on the wall. The independents were being pushed aside and the major labels were merging.

No one was making money. He put down his guitar, and started investing in property.

“I was a little jaded, I have to be honest,” Ryan said. “The music business was 75 per cent business, 25 per cent music at best.”

“Now, I am back in it for the same reason that I started. I enjoyed writing songs and having fun, and that is basically what this record is all about, it is the sheer

enjoyment in music again.”

This is the time / when suddenly / all good things / seem like they’re / turning to gold. (*Sweet Summer Release*).

It was New Year’s Eve two years ago that Ryan began playing again. He was hanging out with friends, including musician Lennie Gallant. They were coerced into pulling out their guitars.

“I blew the dust off mine, and started playing a song. It felt so right,” Ryan said. “I was getting the bug again, and the songs just started coming out of me.”

It was around this time he heard Gabriel’s trumpets and felt

St. Cecilia’s inspiration. He played a few of the songs he wrote for Gallant, who urged Ryan to release them.

“He motivated me let them out,” Ryan said. He worked with Juno-award winner Hayward Parrott on the album, and recorded when he felt inspired. There was some trepidation, but the studio spoke to him.

The first single, *Sweet Summer Release*, is being played on radio. It also beat out Kelly Clarkson and Jann Arden on C100 FM’s Battle of the Block Rockin’ Beats.

“It was the most uncalculated record I ever made,” Ryan said. “And, I guess that is the way records should be made.”

CD REVIEWS

Billie Jean is not my cover

Chris Cornell: Carry On

★★★★☆

Forget that Cornell is the former frontman for Soundgarden, Audioslave and Temple of the Dog. Forget the otherwise hard-edged but non-threatening tunes on this disc.

Focus instead on the mysterious reasons Cornell has for covering Michael Jackson’s *Billy Jean*. Why, Chris, why? Why did you slow it down until it’s almost a ballad? Why? — Richard Dooley

Bachman-Cummings: Jukebox

★★★★★

I was initially skeptical about this: The Guess Who in duo form interpret tunes from artists they listened to as young bandmates in Winnipeg. But this CD’s a winner because it breathes new life into some forgotten classics.

Listen to Cummings take on the Cliff Richards’ and the Shadows’ song *Don’t Talk to Him*. Not only does he do it justice, Cummings now owns it. The hard-rock edge given to The Box Tops classic *The Letter*, Bo Diddley’s *Who Do You Love* and Dylan’s *Like a Rolling Stone* is well worth the price of admission. — Richard Dooley

UB40: Live At Montreux 2002

★★★★☆

Pretty well what you expect: the pop/reggae band performs its greatest hits live. Includes the overplayed Neil Diamond tune *Red Red Wine* and the band’s own underappreciated *Rat In the Kitchen*. Entertaining overall, but the vocalists have had better days. — Jim Reyno

KELLY JONES: Only The Names Have Been Changed

★★★★☆

Brit-rocker and Stereophonics singer-songwriter Jones turns out a unique disc of earnest odes to women. Ten songs, each named after a girl, offer interesting takes on life, love and the human condition.

Recorded in one or two takes between Stereophonics recording sessions, Jones opts for sparse instrumentation, often just a single guitar playing under Jones’s rich baritone.

These tunes are vastly different than the usual Stereophonics fare, but they’re worthwhile and provocative. — Richard Dooley

SHREK THE THIRD: Motion Picture Soundtrack

★★★☆☆

The movie’s bad, but the soundtrack’s worse. While the *Shrek The Third* album is sprinkled with big names like Macy Gray, Led Zeppelin and The Ramones, the songs fall flat — with the exception of Fergie’s cover of *Barracuda*.

It’s the kind of music that probably sounds pretty good while you’re actually watching the movie, but is way too weak to stand alone. — Heather Sawers