

Can you help us by suggesting subjects for our "Spotlight" column. This month we

"Spotlight" - Ron McNeill

by Colleen Michael

Ron McNeill is an award-winning singer, songwriter, producer, Master HVAC Journeyman, humanitarian, father, son, and so much more, all rolled into one.

Ron attended school in Chipman and Minto, until he moved to Calgary in grade four. He finished school there and continued his education at The Southern Institute of Technology, where he received his HVAC tickets.

When he's not involved in music, Ron is busy as an estimator, bringing in enough work in and around Calgary, to keep his crew going all year long. He and his partner live just outside of Calgary, in Airdrie, as well as at a home in Calgary, and split their time between the two.

Ron used to come back every summer until recently, he tells me. "I love New Brunswick, it's awesome, the pace of life is so much better." He's looking forward to coming back once again.

Ron is the son of the late Vernon McNeill and Gloria (Roper) Sanderson, and music is in his roots it would seem. The McNeill's are known for their musical talents. To date, Ron has had over 60 songs recorded in Canada, the USA and Australia.

He and his bandmates whether it's his cover band or with his girlfriend Georgie, have played many venues. From Stampede functions, to the local legions, from local pubs to the Century Casino, his music has definitely been heard in Calgary.

Come Stampede time, Ron and his bandmates usually find themselves booked ten days straight. He can't wait to get back to living a normal life. "With no music, no art, no culture, no dining, no family, no connections, you know, a simple thing like a handshake is a very important thing."

In 2013 Ron produced Georgie Lyons debut album "Since You Came Along". "We went to Nashville, where we got to work with some amazing musicians in a really awesome studio. It was a great experience, and we learned a lot."

"I had lived in Nashville

for a couple of years, and I've made a few connections with some studio guys and studio people. I've been working out of Nashville for about 15 years now, writing, producing, doing demos and other projects."

"I also produced for a buddy of mine, Darren Crone, about four years ago and it was up for "Folk Recording of the Year" in Calgary. So that turned out really good."

He's played all over. In Vancouver it was at the Country Music Associations after gala party in 2009. "I kicked that bash off with an original song, along with our band."

Ron says he was always interested in song writing and says, "I just thought, hey I can do this, I can write a song. I think the fourth song that I wrote got on the radio. It was for a buddy of mine, Justin Ament. He was a Canadian Idol contestant and came in 12th or 13th. I wrote his first radio single. He sang it in front of some huge crowds, opening for Merle Haggard and Leeann Rimes in the States.

"First time I heard my song on the radio driving down the road was a pretty cool experience. It was a really hot day, I had the window rolled down, my arm out, and then my song came on the radio. I was like Wow! It was a very cool experience to hear something that you've created being played on the radio."

Shane Chisholm, from Alberta, also released one of Ron's songs called, "Kickin up Dust". That song made its way up the Queensland Australian Country Charts and hit #16. "It was pretty cool to see my song on the charts with some pretty big name people."

In 2019 Ron was inducted into the Country Music Wall of Fame in Minto New Brunswick joining his father, Vernon McNeill, as well as his Aunts, Lorraine and Jocelyn, Uncle Dave, his cousin, Lonnie, Uncle Clarence, and Uncle Dale. "Everybody in our family plays, our cousins, most of the kids too. Music is a huge part of our core, we had a big family and they all played. We've got lots of musicians in our family that's for sure."



Asked what instruments he plays? Ron replied, "I'm a decent guitar player. I play guitar and sing obviously, and I write." I mention that's he's pretty awesome, he replies with, "My mom thinks so."

"For The Love of Children Society"

In 2013 Ron and Georgie teamed up and brought Canadian country music to a new corner of the world. Together they wrote the feature song "Let it Burn", for the Movie "For the Love of the Children". The song was performed by Ron McNeill and the Calgary Arts Academy Children's choir, under the direction of Georgie Lyons. The movie premiered at The Monaco International Film Festival, winning Best Feature Documentary and Best Picture.

Ron co-wrote, produced, and sang the track which won the Best International Documentary", and he received the Angel Award for Humanitarian work at the Monaco International Film Fest.

He and Georgie wrote a song called "Shine On". Georgie, a music teacher, taught it to her students, adding some Swahili. They recorded it and sent it to a school in Africa whose children did the same, recording themselves and sending it back. This created a friendship that led to sponsorship and the two schools are now sister schools. They were able to build a new classroom with that sponsorship.

Now we have turned the song, "Shine On", into a children's book. It will be fully illustrated and is scheduled to be out next

month. Because he is a humanitarian all the funds from the book will go to support the "For The Love of Children Society"

The Society sponsors 10,000 children a month; from Canada, to Africa, to Tibet, all over the world. "It's a pretty cool thing to be involved with right," he says.

"Waiting on the Day"

What's happening right now is the release of his new album, "Waiting on the Day". The album cover

shows a very young Ron jamming with a mandolin, together with his father Vernon on drums, Uncle Dave on guitar, Eddie Richard on Bass, and young Brad watching on, with their band "Noah's Ark". They were pretty well known around here with their songs on the radio in the 70's. The picture is taken in front of his grandmother's house in Minto, a home his Aunt Jocelyn still lives in. "A lot of music's come out of that house, from the inside, the outside, and the front porch too; I thought that was a good picture to represent where I come from."

"We did some work in Chipman too, Uncle Dave has a studio in his house, so we did some recording there, some vocals and harmonies; he's singing on my record as well."

Ron's CD is finally here. It is awesome and, of course, part of the proceeds will be going to the "For the Love of Children Society". It's just a pre-release, so people, mostly friends and

family, are buying it right now, because they're raising money for a foundation that is close to Ron's heart.

You can check it out and hear snippets of the album on his website, <https://ronamcneill.com>. So far 1100 copies have been pre-sold. You can order a copy through the website or by calling his Aunt Lorraine at 327-3235.

I was lucky to be gifted a copy of the CD, and it's fantastic, I totally recommend you picking one up. Ron recommends "Throwing it in the truck and turning it up loud. It's good driving music and a great CD." Thank you Ron, for taking time to share your incredible life with me, and allowing me to share it with our small corner of the world.

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Editor's Note: Colleen Michael is our "Spotlight" columnist. Our apologies for omitting her name on last month's spotlight on Sharon Lockwood.

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