

ROCK ICONS



Jeff Jones & Gerry Finne: Canadian Rock 'n Roll Stories

Interview and photos by
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Two veteran Canadian musicians and Juno award winners with long and impressive resumes have joined forces to form the acoustic duo Jones-Finn. Jeff Jones has performed as bassist and singer with Burton Cummings, Tom Cochrane and Lawrence Gowan, and began his career as a member of the band Ocean, recording the hit song Put Your hand in The Hand. Gerry Finn has played guitar with Helix, David Usher, and has been a member of Killer Dwarfs for the past 30 years. Together this unlikely duo performs for the love of playing, but also have been penning some original tracks with an eye to the future and a possible music release for 2023.

When did you guys meet?

GF - I started playing with Jeff when I joined The Carpet Frogs which was about 10 or 11 years ago, but first time I saw Jeff play was at a jam at Lee's Palace around 1987. Coincidentally, that was the first time I ran into Randy Cooke as well who's a great drummer and became a really good friend.

JJ - Gerry came on board with us ten or 12 years ago now with the Carpet Frogs. There is a separation with The Carpet Frogs and Burton Cummings. There's another guitarist that plays with us with Burton Cummings called Tim Bovaconti, but occasionally, if Tim can't make a gig, Gerry will do that gig as well.

GF - With Red Rider Jeff is such a fixture even though Tom is the face of the band. I've been aware of Jeff since I was a teenager so when I was starting to play with Carpet Frogs it was particularly thrilling to be on stage with Jeff and his pedigree and he was so accommodating and supportive and fun to be on stage with.

Just before the pandemic you guys re-recorded Put Your Hand in The Hand which was a huge song for the band Ocean which you were a part of Jeff. Was that the catalyst for you guys to work together as a duo?

GF - It Might have been. The guy that recorded and produced that session, Ken Friesen, also works with Tom Cochrane and he was David Usher's sound man 20 years ago when I was playing with David, so Jeff and I had a close relationship with him independent of each other. When he was recording the song Ken was asking me if I could come up and play on it and Jeff was saying the same thing.

JJ - That was the first song I ever

recorded, and that's what basically started me on this road to disaster. I mean really, it's what kept me in the game because I had massive success right out of the box. But we decided 50 years later to re-record our own, what I call my hillbilly version of Put Your Hand in The Hand, and Gerry played some really phenomenal dobro. We did everything basically together and then brought in a few other musicians to finish. We discovered in doing that that we really had a knack for playing together that was really natural and easy, and we understand each other's terminology. So that was just before the pandemic hit.

GF - So when we got away from the Carpet Frogs environment and got in the studio together I think we realized there was more chemistry there than we realized. We were really happy with how that came out and soon after that the talk of more recording came up and then we decided to go out and do some playing.

JJ - And seeing him with Helix and David Usher and with Killer Dwarfs, he's more of a metal guy, but people don't realize what he can do with an acoustic guitar and how proficient and expressive he is. You know, he also has a side project called The Rowdymen, which is traditional Newfoundland music.

And this stuff just comes out of him. He's like most Newfoundlanders, you put an instrument in his hand and it doesn't matter what it is he can play and make it sound good. He came and did this one show in this little place with me and that just clicked like crazy and we've been doing it ever since. As a duo, he does the heavy lifting on guitar.

I'm a bass player by trade, but I can play enough guitar to support myself. But there's something special about having two jumbo acoustics going at the same time perfectly in tune. It really takes on a life of its own. And so once we started doing that, we're just hell bent on continuing.

Most people know you as a rock guitarist Gerry, with Killer Dwarfs and Helix and David Usher but you were brought up playing classical and Jazz guitar, weren't you?

GF - Yes I was, I took classical guitar as a child and I studied jazz guitar in university for four years in Nova Scotia. I went there as a young rock guitar player thinking one or two years and I'd be a great guitar player and after six months I realized I knew nothing about playing

guitar. And I still know nothing. They say the more you learn, the more you realize how little you know. It was a good start to my career to have a more academic education.

The two of you are actually both pretty good singers.

JJ - Yeah, and I guess I've been known for it a bit more, but this is the other part of Jones Finn. Gerry has really upped his game vocally since doing these things.

When we're playing with The Carpet Frogs, for example, every guy in the band is a lead singer, so when he joined, there wasn't a lot of room for him and he'd throw in parts or whatever but he didn't have a chance to really explore and feature. But when we're just playing the two of us in acoustics without drums or amplifiers, the vocal becomes the thing and the nuance of the vocal becomes easier to capture. So, in the last couple of years, Gerry really upped his game on that level.

I'm shocked that you only have one solo album Jeff. I think Positive is a great album.

JJ - I started a second record, which was called Heir of Desperation and it only ended up being an EP.

It was started to be an album but I was touring so much with Tom Cochran and with Burton Cummings and Bachman and Cummings and The Carpet Frogs that I ran out of time. We just went, "Well, we have three songs that are complete that we think are good, let's just go with that."

That's my life between the touring and I'm a family man. I have kids that are now older than most people that will be reading this. But I'm very involved in my kid's life and my family life. When I would be home from touring, I didn't feel quite ready to say, okay, I'm home, but I'm going to be locked away in a studio for most of the time.

When it comes to writing for me and recording, I need concentrated blocks of time that I really just go. The Positive album that you've mentioned, which was produced by Ken Greer from Red Rider, we locked ourselves away writing that every day for 30 days. And then for another 30 days we went in and laid it all down. It was quite a period of time where we did just that for 60 days and I haven't had two months since then.

Have the two of you done much writing over the last couple years?

that we've written together. We've played some of them live and it's been really fun because often you'll write a song, record it and then it's released and that becomes the definitive version of the song. If you write it and then play it live, the song will continue to evolve and you'll end up with a more fully realised song that way. So we're writing and sort of workshopping songs live so it's evolving.

JJ - I'm starting to try to accomplish that and I do get a few minutes of time here and there or hours where I can develop a few ideas. But I find that frustrating because once I get started, I don't want to stop. So yeah, I hope that you somewhere along the line can get a listen to the Heir of Desperation EP because I'm quite proud of it as well and we play those songs that are on that EP. Gerry and I do them acoustically now.

Is there a plan to release something soon?

GF - I like to think that sometime this year we'll have something out. Probably not on vinyl but something digitally released.

JJ - We have this one piece that we feel is really great and I think it's going to be the centerpiece of something larger.

What do your shows consist of musically right now? Do you do any songs from your respective bands?

JJ - Yeah, we do a couple of Cochrane songs and we actually do a Blue Rodeo song. We don't do a Burton Cummings song, not because I don't love his music, but because a lot of his stuff

is basically piano based so it doesn't necessarily translate as well

I have played with him for coming up to 22 years now, but I guess with Tom's stuff, I was with him during the writing of a lot of stuff and the recording of a lot of stuff so the songs are really a part of my psyche.

So that's where we're going, and we do a number of covers, some of which are well known, some are less well known, and most have our own spin to it. We just have a blast and it's just a great feeling of ease that happens when we play.

How did you enjoy your experience performing in Windsor last December for the Rock N' Roll for Hunger show?

GF - It was amazing. It was just great to be part of that charity and really fun to mingle with the other bands. I think it was really well received and it was the first time Jeff and I had gone out overnight somewhere to perform as Jones and Finn.

Are there any touring plans?

GF - What Jeff and I do is fill in the blank spaces in our calendars. There's always holes for us to play. There's a show in February in Toronto for example. Even though we're getting busier with our other projects, there are always going to be opportunities for the duo. We just want to get out and play. Our immediate expectations are really simple. It's not like we're trying to rev up a machine with 20 people involved, it's just two of us with acoustic guitars.

