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THE RICK WASHBROOK

"I REMEMBER SITTING IN FRONT OF a campfire at the age of 12. Someone suggested that I should pick up a guitar which was sitting idle nearby," pondered the accomplished guitarist. Little did Rick Washbrook know at the time that playing guitar would turn out to be his life's calling.

Known simply as Washbrook now, Rick's older brothers Donald and Johnny both starred on CBC radio in Toronto during the mid-1950s. The early success of his brothers was guided primarily by his mother Dorothy who championed the careers of her talented sons, which would include Rick years later. Johnny went to New York where his career flourished and ultimately led to a call from producers in Hollywood and a starring role in the popular television show 'My Friend Flicka'.

photograph by roger carlsen, 1990
For promotional ad 'Heartline'.

Guitar Man

One Man's Journey

STORY

text by garnet brydon

Rick's father Bert loaded up the family Buick and with Donny and another brother, Michael, in tow they set out to join Dorothy and Johnny in California. Not surprisingly, given their raw talent and appeal, the brother's careers continued to prosper. Johnny went on to appear in numerous popular television shows including: 'My Three Sons', 'Perry Mason', 'Lassie', 'Wagon Train' and many other hits. A few years later Rick Washbrook was born in California's San Fernando Valley and his story began amidst the enormous success that surrounded him.

The oldest brother Donald appeared regularly as the grocery boy on the hit series 'Petticoat Junction' and everything seemed to be going in favour of the Washbrook family. At the height of his brother's careers Rick remembers visits to their family home by celebrities which included the family of another, then child star, Roddy McDowall.

The Washbrook's continued to reside in California until Rick's brothers outgrew their child acting roles. Johnny moved to New York and began acting in live theatre, while Donny pursued other interests.

Rick's journey began in 1971 when he discovered that fireside guitar and the magic feelings that ignited his passion for playing. Rick said his early attempts at writing concerned his father who was convinced young Rick's creativity was 'not normal'. His mother Dorothy however was sure Rick's creativity was just that. By 1975 Rick was living in Ontario and attending high school in Aurora where he discovered the

genius of legendary jazz guitarist Lenny Breau. At this time in Rick's life he was playing mostly blues.

Dana Stone, a friend of Rick's, recalls Rick's own early ability to captivate listeners. Rick liked to visit the Music Shoppe in Thornhill and "kids would gather around to hear him play". He confirmed that Rick's playing was amazing even at that point. He cites the following humorous incident.

The owner, Paul Spencley said, "if you were eighteen I could get you a job as a teacher here." Rick, who was 16 at the time, said, "I am 18" and started teaching shortly thereafter. "I still remember the look on Paul's face when we celebrated Rick's 18th birthday!"

After studying at the Royal Conservatory of Music and then learning the Recording Engineering trade at Fanshawe College in London, Ontario, Rick ventured West. He accepted odd jobs to earn money so he could travel the Alaska Highway. He played gigs at roadhouses along the way, whilst learning the ropes of playing professionally.

Rick's singing, which began in St. Michaels Choir while still in California, started to mesh with both his songwriting and guitar playing. By 1986 Rick had achieved success of his own, with the release of his debut album 'Summer Roads'. One song, 'I Don't Believe' charted Top 10 in Canada while three other singles from the same album went as high as 18 on Canadian charts. Rick's debut album was followed by a string of playing engagements at clubs, fairs, and corporate events.



photograph by michael pacek, 1981

Upon return from West Coast.

Sadly, Rick's luck turned in 1990 with the passing of his father Bert and only one year later the death of his mother Dorothy.

With his greatest supporters gone Rick's spiritual conscience gained greater importance in his life as he struggled with his grief. He emerged determined to raise his skill level and studied the music of many influences more than ever. His songwriting hit a new high when 'Rescued By The Arms Of Love', a song he co-wrote with Wayne Parker and Allan Frew of Glass Tiger rose to #3 on the Billboard Charts in 1992. It appeared Rick Washbrook had arrived.

At this point in Rick's life, his country-blues-swing-rockabilly pickings took something of a backseat to his longstanding interest in jazz. He continued to work hard at growing his craft, all the while playing in such romantic locales as Tahiti, Costa Rica, and Switzerland. Rick's penchant for playing was accelerated by his willingness to learn from other talented musicians. A student of Bob Erlendson, who also

taught Lenny Breau, Rick was committed totally to his craft. He paid a high personal price for that commitment, suffering many of the personal hardships artists frequently experience. More personal blows came when his brothers Michael and Donald died in 1997 and 1998 respectively. To say it has been a long, hard road would not be an exaggeration in describing Rick's journey.

Since 1999, Rick's music has matured greatly and his talents in all facets of his craft are emerging into his own unique style. Rick beams with delight and pride in speaking about his last release 'A Gypsy's Bed'—a tribute to Lenny Breau cd.

That release has brought on a whole new round of accolades from notable musicians including Don Thompson, Ed Bickertt, Liona Boyd, and more recently Randy Bachman who said, "His understanding of Lenny's technique is astounding."

If you are not familiar with Lenny Breau, his genius is recognized world-wide by many accomplished musicians. It is legendary and influential because Lenny had the ability to create a sound sensation that left listener's puzzled at how he could play what seemed like three guitars simultaneously. Rick exudes a similar ability. His current teacher/mentor Bob Erlendson, who discovered and also taught Lenny Breau, commented, "Rick's been doing it his own way, which is very admirable."

Rick's guitar styling is as infectious as his smile. He exudes a genuine respect for others. Wayne Parker said, "If he (Rick) lived in Chicago or St. Louis, New Orleans, New York or L. A. he'd have been discovered years ago, and all Jazz fans would know him." These words of praise suggest Moe Koffman was right when he commented, "Rick Washbrook has what it takes to go to the top." At the time of writing

Touring album 'Summer Roads'.



photograph by roger carlsen, 1986



photograph by maria baldock, 1993

Performing live in Marikham at The Duke.

this article I was reading reviews of 'A Gypsy's Bed' from several radio stations south of the border who were bestowing accolades on Rick's tribute cd. Eric Cohen, Music Director of WAER 'Jazz 88' in Syracuse wrote, "The explorations he (Rick) takes on the guitar make the listener feel that Lenny Breau is right there watching with a smile. This is a tribute that hits all the right notes." "Rick Washbrook's 'A Gypsy's Bed' is an exquisite tribute to Lenny Breau. This record belongs in the collection of every jazz guitar and swing enthusiast," Joe Kocherhans, Program Director, KSDS in San Diego, stated emphatically.

While the reviews keep coming for Rick's pure talent on guitar, his life goes on and the journey continues. Rick has been living in the Kawarthas for about two years. He likes the natural beauty of the area and the many friendships he has made while continuing to master his art. He makes his home in Lindsay where he plays local and nearby establishments periodically. If you are lucky you just may hear him over your shoulder as he tests instruments at VanHalteren's music centre or catch him playing a set at the Winchester Arms.

If you want to discover Rick Washbrook's music, simply listen to one of his six cd releases or if you are learning to play guitar, learn from Rick on video—check him out at www.washbrook.com **itk**



photograph by roger carlsen, 2002
Promotional shot for possible use in upcoming ad.