

Canadian music icons take the stage at the Aurora Cultural Centre in 2015



By Brock Weir

At the age of 23, being a part of Art Garfunkel's opening act was a formative experience for musician John Sheard.

When the future Canadian music icon Dan Hill came out with his hit *Sometimes When We Touch* in the late 1970s, he needed a pianist to join him on tour where he was due to open for Garfunkel for 40 shows.

"Dan, more than anybody in my musical life, has been an influence and responsible for my moving up and upping my game musically because he is a perfectionist and a hard working guy," says Mr. Sheard.

Mr. Sheard of CBC's *Vinyl Café*, a popular mainstay at the Aurora Cultural Centre, will share the stage once again with Mr. Hill this spring as part of "The Great Reunion" concert series.

"The Great Reunion", which is returning to the Aurora Cultural Centre for the second year, is the brainchild of Mr. Sheard and this year he is bringing out the big guns of Canadian music for his three-concert series, beginning with Sylvia Tyson on Friday, January 30.

Award winning blues musician Chris Whitley performs on Saturday, May 2, while Dan Hill rounds out the series on Friday, June 12.

"I have played with Sylvia in a couple of contexts on two consecutive records with her, and it was just so easy and a lot of fun musically," Mr. Sheard tells *The Auroran* while in tour with the *Vinyl Café* in Saskatchewan. "She is such a great writer we thought she would be a perfect mix for this concert series. She is accessible and we can have some fun with her."

It wasn't tough to sell Ms. Tyson on the Aurora Cultural Centre, he adds. In putting a series like this together, the venue is always important to artists, and Mr. Sheard said the "welcoming atmosphere" of the historic Church Street landmark is tough to beat "and the fact they "cared enough to put a real piano in there" sweetened the deal.

Also sweetening the deal? An opportunity for these veteran musicians to get out of their comfort zones and try new things in a new venue.

"I have never done a live show with Sylvia, just her without Quartet," says Mr. Sheard of her regular band. "This is the first time I

will have been able to play with her as a solo artist, so I am really looking forward to that. She is great. With Dan, it is always such fun to play with him because he doesn't perform live very often at all these days.

?We have such a rapport together. We are just doing it, he and I, and we haven't done that in eight or 10 years. I can almost walk onto a concert stage with Dan tomorrow without a rehearsal and we would be totally on our game, so that is the nice thing about playing with somebody for 40 years.

?With Chris Whitely, he is such a great guy, a great singer, and a great multi-instrumentalist. It has been such a long time I have played with him and doing the kind of stuff we will be doing. He normally does blues stuff, but not the Gershwin jazzy stuff we are going to do.?

All of the artists, he says, have their different strengths and are each a ?blast? to play with, and this will come through to the audience. The audience, in turn, will see all of these artists in situations they will likely never see again.

?You will never see Dan Hill and I together as a duo, he just doesn't do that. You will never see Sylvia Tyson in this format, I guarantee it. Chris will be doing material from five or six years ago, and it will be unique for all of these performers. I think the audience will be thrilled to hear all three of these artists.

?They are all so totally different. For me, it will demand a different aspect of my abilities as a player. I don't really know what is going to happen. It will all be great, but it is a little bit exciting for me because it is new to me too. They all demand a different aspect of what I do, so I am looking forward to pushing myself a little bit.?