

## Lawless provides new 'Footnote' to old instruments on latest album



**By Brock Weir**

It's a natural feeling for singers, songwriters and other artists to create with a degree of loss or longing, according to Aurora native Gregg Lawless.

Some of the oldest themes in the book are unrequited love, boy meets girl, boy loses girl, and quite often that sense of loss, being discarded, and consigned to a footnote and being forgotten in the wider scheme of things.

These artists, including Mr. Lawless, often find beauty in this unlikely source, but the former Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School student takes things one step further in his latest album, *Footnote*, which launches this week in Toronto.

Covering a variety of genres, the album is tied together with the sounds of instruments which had been beaten up, discarded, and collecting dust, possibly outmoded but silenced.

These slide guitars had been recovered at garage sales for as cheap as \$10 to Craigslist finds as high as \$100, with the occasional instruments given to him free outright or piecemeal. They conspire to create a unique sound which resonates with the musician.

'Slides are a lot closer to the sound of a human voice than regular guitar playing,' says Mr. Lawless. 'Everybody has their niche as a guitar player. For me, the neat thing about the slide guitar or the sitar is you can get all the notes that are in between the 'pure' notes, the half-hones and the things that are slightly sharp or slightly flat and that can give a lot of emotion to the song.'

'Part of the beauty of using these cheap guitars is you really have to wrestle the sound out of them.'

From his perspective, slide guitars are not the easiest of instruments and when you have one at your fingertips, you need to think just a little bit more about the notes and be more aggressive.

'These guitars are a little rougher around the edges,' he says. 'If you pick up a Gibson Les Paul and play a few notes on it, it is easier to get a good sound out of it than if you pick up a 1962 Kay someone ordered through the Sears Catalogue for \$20 and it is beat up and the strings are high off the neck. You have to work a lot harder to make that sound good and it does really change the way you approach the instrument. I enjoy the idea of fighting the guitar a little bit to get the tone out of it.'

While the instruments might be a little rough around the edges, Mr. Lawless assuredly is not. *Footnote* is his fourth album. The title song explores feelings of rejection that come with the end of a relationship, becoming a 'footnote in the larger chapter of life,' he says. He provides a degree of 'resurrection' to these instruments on his album, which brings together everything from reggae to

Ragtime ? but more on the Ragtime later.

Featured on the album are collaborating musicians including Mark Kelso, Marc Rogers, and pianist John Sheard.

Taking these strands in hand, the important thing for any musician to do is write these songs but perform them in a way that is fresh and new. It is essential for him to put his own stamp on these songs.

Although he didn't make the CD to appeal to any specific audience, Footnote will appeal to at least one of Mr. Lawless' biggest fans. One track which has particular meaning for him is 'Marcella', an ode to his mother, which he debuted before a live audience here in Aurora last year, at the Williams' 125th Anniversary Reunion.

'It's a song that took me about 20 years to write,' he says. 'For years, she had been bugging me to write a song for her and I tried many times, but pulled the plug quickly on them because they were sentimental. It took me a long time to figure out that the best way to write about my mum, who is a real character, was to write a slightly saucy, slightly irreverent song in a ragtime style.

'She was born in 1930 and I tried to write a period piece that would reflect her character and the music she would have heard when she was little. It's a song I was thrilled to record and it is nice John Sheard played piano on it because he is her favourite piano player.'

Looking ahead to this week's launch, he is pleased that over the years his shows continue to attract a large audience whether appearing as himself, or as his alter-ego Gregg LaRock, a name familiar to many former French students of a certain age.

'People come and a lot of them bring their kids,' he says. 'Some come because they like the lyrics, some come because they like the melodic songs that are singable, and some come because they say they love the guitar playing ? they are all good with me!'

'Footnote' launches at Hugh's Room (2261 Dundas Street W., Toronto) this Saturday, January 25 at 8.30 p.m. John Sheard takes the stage at the Aurora Cultural Centre this Friday, January 24 in 'The Great Reunion' with Wendell Ferguson.