

Aurora teacher creates album inspired by Kennedy assassination



By Brock Weir

Scott Garbe might not have a living memory of the assassination of US President John F. Kennedy, which took place in Dallas, Texas, 50 years ago this Friday, but he's carried its impact with him through all of his 48 years.

The Aurora resident, who teaches at King's Country Day School, recalls growing up in a home full of admiration for the late president. They had his speeches on vinyl records, multiple books on Kennedy and 'Camelot', and he counts Jacqueline Kennedy as one of his very first childhood crushes.

It wasn't until Grade 3, however, when he understood the impact of Kennedy's fateful drive through Dealey Plaza.



Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas 50 years ago this Friday.

'I pulled a copy of 'The Torch Is Passed', which is a commemorative book by the Associated Press, off my parents' shelf' he recalls. 'I hadn't known President Kennedy had been assassinated at such a young age. It was just devastating to me that this hero I had built up in my mind was so vulnerable.'

'I think when you're younger, even when you encounter works by Shakespeare or you open up The Diary of Anne Frank for the first time, even though you may not have been alive when that event occurred or when the book was first written, it can still have a major impact on you.'

For him, this impact went beyond the grainy and grizzly images, to Kennedy's message for Civil Rights, his wit, and 'trying to find a peaceful way to resolve international problems.'

As these images mingled in his mind over the decades, it wasn't until 1993 on his first trip to Dallas that he walked in the footsteps of those who had been witnesses to history.

He wondered who they were, what brought them out that day, and what they had ultimately experienced from their vantage points.

This went beyond people lining the route to trying to get in the minds of both Jackie and Lee Harvey Oswald.

The result was 'The Truth About Us', a song written about his experience which was soon covered by The Skydiggers. More songs followed in succession over the years, taking various perspectives and personalities. The result was the album 'The Kennedy Suite 9?', which dropped November 12 and will be presented in a series of concerts commemorating the anniversary this Friday and Saturday at Toronto's Winter Garden Theatre.

The songs will be performed by The Cowboy Junkies and other Canadian artists, including the Skydiggers, Sarah Harmer, Jason Collett, The Good Family, Reid Jamieson, and Harlan Pepper.

A good song starts with storytelling, explains Mr. Garbe, noting he was raised in a family of storytellers who often spun their yarns punctuated by music. Music is an essential way to communicate, he says, and share one's vulnerabilities.

'The songs are about the assassination, but they are also about life and mortality, and a lot of other themes. You don't have to be a conspiracy theorist, or a Kennedy buff to get a lot out of the songs. It is hope lost and living in a world where the political climate is so paralyzed and there seems to be a whole lack of political leadership that has any kind of vision.

'When you're in a place like that, sometimes you look back to the past, to the people who had that. Kennedy is one of those people who did and I think his ideas are still relevant today, even though he has been gone for 50 years now.'

At the end of the day, Mr. Garbe says he hopes The Kennedy Suite allows people to reflect on their own lives, how they interact with the people around them, and cherish every moment they have because their time on this planet is so brief.

'I hope they might think again about the positive things Kennedy had to say,' he says. 'It is definitely not background music. You can sit down with a glass of wine, crack open the lyrics, and if people can sit in one place to listen to the whole thing, I think it will create an experience rather than a description of the event, and hopefully lead to some things they hadn't considered before.'

For more information on The Kennedy Suite, visit www.facebook.com/thekennedysuite.