

?Brothers? in arms take on talent in wide-ranging radio competition



By Brock Weir

Brothers of North are no strangers to competition.

The Aurora natives grew up together, went to school together, and shared the highs and lows of everything that entails, but one thing which truly united them was the music.

While most of them studied at Cardinal Carter Catholic High School, it was there most of them picked up musical instruments for the first time and started honing their sound.

Dubbing themselves ?Brothers of North?, many competitions were sent their way, and many competitions were entered, but nothing usually came from them ? until now.

The quartet were astounded to find their song, ?1990s?, made the cut in 102.1 ?the edge's? contest ?The Next Big Thing?, highlighting up-and-coming musicians from the Greater Toronto Area. Out of nearly 630 entries, Brothers of North made the Top 20 and are currently riding high in the Top 10 as listeners wade through the entrants for a band which strikes a chord with them.

?It was a really good feeling [to make the Top 20] because we weren't seeing any progress,? says James Connolly, who provides vocals and guitar for the band. ?I am almost at a loss at how they could pick us. They said there were 627 bands, and that they picked us, I guess it is just a catchy song.?

Connolly and Joe Gallo, who plays lead guitar, have known each other ?forever? and meeting up with a pair of brothers, they would just get together for a few jam sessions. They gradually lost touch but after five years, they met up again, found a drummer in Tom Mackay, and Brothers of North were formed.

“Me and Joe have always known each other forever and as soon as we started to learn how to play guitar, we always wanted to be rock stars but we never thought it would be possible,” says James. “We didn't know how to book gigs, but we just started playing guitar and got into it. We made these demos and thought they were pretty good, but we didn't think we could play them live. We got together with these other guys, started to write lyrics and it wasn't half bad. [After our first show] we couldn't give it up. It was just so much fun.

When they cut their first album, their producer said they had to have a single. “1990s”, he said, was radio friendly because it had lyrics all the way through and people lapped it up. It was no question for them, he said, what song they should upload for this contest and evidently “the edge” felt the same way.

It has come a long way from a typical jam session which had the group sitting around with guitars, working on chords, until they felt they were on the right direction towards a song. Once they had the structure of the song in place, only then was it time to step up to the microphone to see what came out.

“The first thing that came out of my mouth was that it is that 1990s feel that you know and love,” says James. “Whatever comes out of, if it rhymes, we will go with that. I just thought about how I could then use that line as the concept of a song. We added a bit of romance in there with a girl and that is how it came to be.”

Asked what defines that 1990s “feel that we know and love?”, it is a quality James says is hard to pick up on but it was definitely felt on the guitar chords heard over the bridge. There is something of an elusive quality in the style of the band itself. While they embrace bands like Led Zeppelin, individually their musical tastes are constantly in flux and he is reluctant to “pigeon-hole” their sound but it is a sound that connects.

“Last night, we played a show for 200 to 300 people and if we could do that every day, just the energy the crowd gives you after you give all your energy to them is something that is just so, so special,” says James. “If we could just do that every other day, just watching people dance to your music is all we want to do. That's all it is about and connecting with other people is the best thing in the world.”