

## Sharon, Randi, and Ethan charm an engaged multigenerational audience at Town Square



Multiple generations of Sharon, Lois, and Bram fans assembled at Aurora Town Square on Saturday afternoon for an enjoyable trip down memory lane for many, and a new musical experience for some.

Children, parents, and grandparents filled the Davide De Simone Performance Hall to hear Sharon Hampson's insights and listen to her songs that have charmed little kids and big kids for decades.

The children's music icon and Order of Canada recipient was interviewed on-stage by Toronto Legends podcaster Andrew Applebaum.

The Richmond Hill resident--after being introduced by Mayor Tom Mrakas--guided hundreds through an afternoon of anecdotes and singalongs.

Remarkably, Applebaum found the right balance between conversation and well-timed songs that worked for an assembly ranging from toddlers to Golden Agers.

In this setting, Sharon Hampson was the Belle of the Ball, but she shared the spotlight lovingly with her family in the reconstituted show necessitated by Lois's passing in 2015 and Bram's retirement in 2019.

The charming entertainer, who will celebrate fifty years in show business in 2028, was joined on stage by her daughter, Randi, and her grandson, Ethan. The trio delivered many of Sharon, Lois, and Bram's greatest hits to an audience that enjoyed an afternoon of storytelling and timely singalongs when the wee natives approached restlessness.

The music video of "Side by Side" warmed up the group and featured a montage of the legendary group's finest moments, including playing kazoos in three-part harmony.

Upon encouragement from Applebaum, Sharon provided an update on Bram: "I spoke to Bram on Friday and we're in touch regularly. He and his wife spent the winter in Victoria where there was a little less snow than here."

After Bram's retirement, Randi embraced the challenges of the Pandemic to create a new kind of stage show for her family: "I saw COVID as this opportunity to turn the music into a family business. There is such an appetite for Sharon, Lois, and Bram. We're

even working on new children's books.?

Ethan acknowledged there were challenges growing up with such a famous grandmother: "I was not a humble three-year-old. I always knew that there's a famous person in family. It was always a part of my life. The music has been such a big part of our life?it's innate.?"

Ethan rolled into strumming his guitar and Sharon and Randi delivered lead vocals on 1988's "We're All Together Again" to hold the youngsters before Sharon discussed with pride the origins of her career after being prompted by Applebaum.

"It was at the Bohemian Embassy?a real coffee house for people to listen to folk music (Gordon Lightfoot would be there) or listen to poetry with Margaret Atwood, or enjoying jazz at night. I was offered my first job after singing at an Open Mic Night. It was the beginning.?"

Applebaum asked about the challenges of the group's debut album "One Elephant, Deux Elephants" in 1978 and Sharon noted "We didn't press enough albums?we thought 5,000 would be enough and we ran out?which was a nice problem to have.?" Randi added that "now it's Triple Platinum with millions of streams.?"

The program moved from career reflections and highlights back to a favourite song from The Elephant Show in the 1980s as Sharon, Randi, and Ethan delivered "Hey Dum Diddle Dum" to a delighted, bobbing audience which delivered the chorus back to the on-stage entertainers.

A spirited rendering of "Ballin' the Jack" took the event into intermission.

The three-generational audience travelled to Aurora from across the GTA to engage with the animated 83-year-old who showed off her undiminished vocal talents during the two-hour event.

Robbie Chesla of Burlington discussed her deep connection with Sharon, Lois, and Bram: "I'm a graduate of The Elephant Show. I first saw the trio when I was ten at the Shawn O'Sullivan Theatre at Brock University. The three of them had such a great impact on bringing children and families together. It was so good back then?things were very care-free compared to the present. Now, you have to really search for this kind of entertainment.?"

Also enjoying the show was a multigenerational quartet from Newmarket. Katie Duncan brought her sons, five-year-old Blair and three-year-old Russell, to the show as well as her mom Tina Duncan. At intermission, Katie offered insights into the event: "It's very cool and I'm happy to watch the boys enjoy it. They're really passionate about their music and I'm enjoying the stories?they're entertaining to hear.?"

Tina appreciated "the music most of all. It's special and takes us back in time. It's really good for children to come to events and to sit in a theatre for a show. The music takes us out of ourselves and it's really great to see the boys singing along.?"

Michael Cardinal brought his 2 ½-year-old daughter Charlotte to enjoy the show. The Markham resident thought that the best part of the event was "getting to share the music.?"

"I remember when my parents brought us to Sharon, Lois, and Bram. It feels special to be here with Charlotte today. She's really enjoying it. She knows some of the songs through daycare and from home. She was dancing in the aisles. It's such a mixed crowd?it's great to see the range of ages enjoying the show.?"

One of the more amusing anecdotes came after the 15-minute intermission when Applebaum asked Hampson about the trio's appearance at The White House's Easter Egg Roll.

"It was very exciting to meet President Clinton, but he nudged Bram during our photo session to tell us that our time was up. Rumor

has it that Bram took three hand towels with the Seal of the President on them.?

After such suggestions of petty larceny and a spirited delivery of 'Fish and Chips and Vinegar' for the kids of all ages, Applebaum generated much applause for Hampson when he noted her enshrinement in the Order of Canada which Hampson described as 'very thrilling and very exciting, but we weren't allowed to tell anyone.'

'Governor Adrienne Clarkson presented to us and leaned over to me and said 'The last time we were together was in the makeup room at CBC.'

Hampson swooned dramatically when describing the first time she met Harry Belafonte.'He was so handsome!'and spoke glowingly of the impacts of Pete Seeger, Fred Penner, and Ernie Coombs.

Some of the more spontaneous moments took place during the Q and A as Aurora Town Square Manager Phil Rose manned the mic masterfully through the audience. His racing up and down the aisles was reminiscent of an energetic Phil Donahue when he ruled afternoon television with a similar upbeat and invitational manner.

With mic in hand, one attendee confessed 'having a crush on Bram in 1999' to which Sharon responded comically, 'Get in line?', and when the next questioner asked which song was her favourite to perform, the Toronto-born entertainer responded with 'Skinnamarink'we had no idea it would grow to what it became and we closed all our concerts with it.'

In an ensuing comment, one audience member noted that 'Skinnamarink' helped her grieving process because it reminded her of her father singing 'I love you' to her to which Hampson replied 'I hear about generational moments like that and it makes me think that music is such a connector. For that, I am grateful.'

When asked what was the most memorable unscripted moment, Sharon and Randi looked at one another, shared an on-stage chuckle, and the legendary children's artist delivered a gem: 'We were rhyming children's names [in spontaneous songs] and Lois asked a little boy 'What's your name?' The little boy replied, 'Tucker!' We had to sing the song rhyming with Tucker'.

The older segment of the audience identified immediately with the rhyming perils of such a first name.

Sharon reassured a wee lad who suggested 'the Elephant always looks sad' to which she responded grand-maternally: 'You'll have to take our word for it?Elephant is very happy.'

Seamlessly, Sharon, Randi, and Ethan broke out into a closing rendition of 'Skinnamarink' which functioned as an emotional climax for the two hundred guests with Sharon imploring after the last 'I love you' to 'Be sure to sing this love song with everyone you love.'

That warm feeling was carried into the meet-and-greet in the lobby'made complete by the surprise appearance of a very happy and photogenic Elephant. The plush grey pachyderm took his place at the autograph table with Sharon and Randi.

After every album, CD, and book was signed and accompanying photos were taken, Sharon Hampson reflected about the most satisfying aspect of the matinee. She paused and smiled: 'People singing together?grandparents, parents, children?it never ceases to give pleasure. It fun to tell the stories, but it's a great joy to see the generations singing together.'

Randi Hampson echoed her mom's sentiments: 'We are three generations on stage and we met three generations after the show. My son was raised on the music. To have experienced it similarly is really a delight.'

The chemistry between mother and daughter was evident as we chatted in the quiet aftermath and Sharon expressed her gratitude and pride towards Randi for helping her continue her career as an entertainer.

?First of all, being able to work at something you love is a gift. We worked very hard at it for years but for it to evolve into a family experience?it's a bonus. Such a pleasure. I'm so proud of my daughter and grandson.?

During the show, Hampson thanked her daughter ?for stopping me from retiring and keeping the music of Sharon, Lois, and Bram alive.?

Randi, an accomplished lawyer and talented singer who is indeed keeping the trio's music alive, looks after the business logistics of her mom's endearing stage appearances. She smiled and summarized her role: ?I look after things so she gets to do all the fun stuff.?

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