



TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2011

HAMILTON WEEK CONTINUES WITH STEVE STRONGMAN



Hamilton Week continues, as we count down to the start of the annual Hamilton Music Awards and Conference. It begins Thursday in the city affectionately known as The Hammer. Readers will no doubt be puzzled by this Maritimer's fondness for the Ontario steel town, and for explanation I direct you to yesterday's column, which gives a brief history of my involvement, and keen interest in the music scene.

What I've noticed is that you'll find something for everyone in Hamilton, and it's a very supportive musical community. It's not uncommon to see a table with a greying punk from the 1970's, a classical string player, a jazz hand, and a soul singer, shooting the breeze. They'll play on each others records, and they have each others backs. Everyone knows it's a hard road, being a working musician, especially when it's difficult to grab the nation's interest from their area (Toronto media indifference is my theory). So, hard work makes for better musicians, and it happens in each genre.

Today, we look at the blues, and it doesn't surprise me it's popular there. Like the Maritimes, Hamilton can be a gritty spot, with its industrial core. This blue collar aspect reminds me of places such as Sydney, NS and Saint John, NB, where industry rules. Bars are still bars in Hamilton, and there are several good ones I like, which feature live music, pub fare and put-a-pitcher-in-front-of-me service. I'll take that on Friday night, thanks.

From the blues scene of the city comes Steve Strongman, who has it all. He can sit himself done and play solo, wailing away, or get up with an electric band, and rip you a new one. Strongman is one of the country's best guitar players. I know, I know, everybody says their hotshot local is one of the country's best, but in this case, he currently has the proof in hand. He's been nominated for a Maple Blues Award for best guitar player of the year. This puts him in the top five, and it's no half-baked system saying that. The nominations come from a panel of over 50 blues writers, critics, broadcasters, festival organizers, that kind of quality, and from right across the country. So to get past all the warring factions and home town supporters, you have to have some pretty serious credibility. Those awards are coming out January 16th in Toronto by the way.

Strongman's ready to drop an acoustic blues album on us at any point, but for now is enjoying the guitar attention with his most recent electric disc, *Blues In Colour*. On that album, you get a full display of what the guy can do, as the main player in a small band setting. He has a fabulous clean tone, and his work has a lot of 40's and 50's feel to it, uptempo and moving. This is when the jook joint stuff started coming into the Chicago clubs, and electricity turned on all the players, when B.B. ruled the roost with class. That's how I think of Strongman, somebody who can pull off those sweet-sounding solos. Elsewhere on the disc, he slows it down, making the thing cry, and he adds a mean slide

ABOUT ME



Bob Mersereau
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Aveteran Canadian broadcaster, Bob

Mersereau specializes in popular music writing. He's been with CBC TV and Radio since 1982, and regularly reports on the arts. Bob is the author of the Top 100 Canadian Albums, a national best-seller published in 2007, and The Top 100 Canadian Singles, published in September 2010, both from Goose Lane Editions. His music column appears each week on CBC Radio 1 in New Brunswick, on the program Shift, and he has written music articles and reviews for such publications as The Coast Magazine, The Telegraph Journal, and The Globe and Mail.

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to some modern sounds too. Add in a good, high-pitched voice with a bit of urgency, and Strongman, to me is the complete package. Well, that plus a great blues name. He's always a highlight to hear on my visits, and he's building a strong national reputation as well. Mention him to your local festival.

Posted by Bob Mersereau at 9:22 AM



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▼ 2011 (226)

▼ November (14)

[HAMILTON WEEK: SHARON MJSGRAVE](#)

[HAMILTON WEEK CONTINUES WITH STEVE STRONGMAN](#)

[IT'S HAMILTON WEEK! FEATURING THE ARKELLS - MCHI...](#)

[MUSIC REVIEW OF THE DAY: RYAN ADAMS - ASHES & FIR...](#)

[MUSIC REVIEW OF THE DAY: DUKE ROBILLARD BAND - LO...](#)

[MUSIC REVIEW OF THE DAY: FOLLY & THE HUNTER - RES...](#)

[MARINE DREAMS DEBUT DISC, SHOW TONIGHT IN FREDERIC...](#)

[MUSIC REVIEW: JOHNNY CASH - LIVE AROUND THE WORLD...](#)

[MUSIC REVIEW OF THE DAY: PINK FLOYD - WSH YOU WE...](#)

[MUSIC REVIEW OF THE DAY: MAYER HAWTHORNE - HOW DO...](#)

[MUSIC REVIEW OF THE DAY: TOM WAITS - BAD AS ME](#)

[MUSIC REVIEW OF THE DAY: DARYL HALL - LAUGHING DO...](#)

[MUSIC REVIEW OF THE DAY: PAUL SIMON - SONGWRITER](#)

[MUSIC REVIEW OF THE DAY: THE BEACH BOYS - THE SM...](#)

► [October \(24\)](#)

► [September \(22\)](#)

► [August \(17\)](#)

► [July \(19\)](#)

► [June \(21\)](#)

► [May \(27\)](#)

► [April \(20\)](#)

► [March \(25\)](#)

► [February \(22\)](#)

► [January \(15\)](#)

► [2010 \(38\)](#)