

MUSIC
by JASON LEWIS

Location is everything
Scott MacLeod finds a voice and collaborators in Calgary

>>PREVIEW
SCOTT MACLEOD
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Ship & Anchor Pub

For many businesses – whether it's retail sales or restaurants – it's said that location is everything. As Scott MacLeod found out, the same is true for making music.

MacLeod had been strumming away on his guitar for years in Prince Edward Island, finding limited success with assorted covers and a smattering of original tunes at open mic nights. But, in 2001, he decided it was time to shake things up. Like many musical explorers, he packed up and headed west.

"There were a lot of reasons. The main thing is, I just wanted a change," he says. With several friends in Alberta and family in Canmore, Calgary became his new base of operations. "I was just getting comfortable playing back on P.E.I.... Calgary offered me a really warm music environment. I met a lot of cool people who were so supportive."

Taking what he had learned at home, MacLeod joined the open-mic circuit, becoming a regular at Karma Local Arts House. Soon he realized that he was going to have to start playing more than a handful of songs a night.

"I guess in my mind I got to the point where I was getting comfortable," he says. "I got to the point where I thought, this is OK. I'm not getting too many tomatoes. I need to take it where I want it to go – to the next level."

As he honed his playing and storytelling, he began to amass more original material. At the same time he started meeting more artists from Calgary's singer-songwriter community. Both of those factors led to his visit to the studio in spring of 2005.

"Over the past few years I just got to know these different musicians through the open mics and I would say to them, I want to do an album here. And they would say, if you ever need any help, just let me know."

As a result, MacLeod's easygoing full-length debut is loaded with local guest stars. Balancing MacLeod's evocative roots rock are members of Blood Dungeon, Soultree and Cam Penner's backing band, among others. The result is an album that rolls with mournful harmonica, winds along with lap steel solos and shimmers with B3 organ. It's a big step forward for a guy who admits he was so nervous at his first open mic night in Calgary that he got too drunk to play. Now that he has got over his stage fright, MacLeod's next move is to share the album with as many people as possible. With shows on the folk fest circuit this summer, MacLeod is once again on the move, but after living with these songs for more than five years, he is ready for it.

"Everything seems to go so much slower than I'd like it," he says. "But a lot of times, people around me have to remind me, look where I was a year ago, and that's fair."