

Arts

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Ex-computer programmer a popular act

Thomas Kovacs put down his mouse, picked up a mic and the rest is history as they say. Fans can catch his performance at various local bars, restaurants and pubs in Dufferin County.

By **CHRIS HALLIDAY**
challiday@orangevillebanner.com

If you're a frequent pub crawler in Orangeville or the surrounding area, chances are you've seen musician and songwriter Thomas Kovacs perform.

You've probably seen him weave seamlessly back-and-forth from covers like Roger Miller's King of the Road to Otis Redding's Sittin' on the Dock of the Bay or Bob Marley's No Woman No Cry. He also tosses in some smash hits from The Tragically Hip, The Mamas and the Papas, and much more, into the mix.

"It just flies all over the map. That is what people really seem to like the most. ... It is not just limited to either country or rock or rock 'n' roll, it is all of it," Kovacs said. "I don't zero in on one (genre). People say, 'I just love to listen to you because you play so many different things and all great songs.'"

The simple fact, however, is Orangeville and its surrounding area has, in a way, become the breeding ground for Kovacs' career. Many local pubs including The Mad Hatter, Fionn MacCool's, Black Birch Restaurant and Ray's 3rd Generation Bistro in Alton have taken notice of his music, booking the Bolton resident for gigs on a more than regular basis.

"I can't explain why Orangeville has become such a hotbed for my gigs. That is where I gig the most," he said. "It is very frequent that I'm asked to do encore after encore after encore. I'm not allowed to leave the stage. It is quite overwhelming."

Had Kovacs not made a tough decision last year, however, his recent success in Orangeville and area may not be a story to talk about today. Working for Canadian Tire at the age of 50, Kovacs took a leap of faith in January of 2010, leaving his 13-year career as a computer programmer and



Contributed photo

Thomas Kovacs, who quit his job as a computer programmer for Canadian Tire to pursue his dream of being a full-time musician in January of 2010, has become a more than regular performer on the stage of a variety of pubs in Orangeville and its surrounding area recently.

application specialist behind to pursue his dream of becoming a musician.

"I loved the job, the people were great and the work was really stimulating, yet all the while, the music was still pulling at my heartstrings," he said. "Eventually, the pull was so strong that I knew that it was now or never."

"I realized I could do this (Canadian Tire) job until I retired but then what? There isn't really a way you can do music at 75 or 65 or whatever, so I said it is now or never."

His recent popularity in Orangeville has been phenomenal, Kovacs said, explaining he's delighted to hear managers of local pubs tell him patrons are actually reserving tables for his upcoming performances well in advance. In fact, he relishes in past gigs at The Mad Hatter and Fionn MacCool's, where "they wouldn't even let me off the stage," an "overwhelmed" Kovacs recalled.

"You have to remember I was at a desk for 13 years. Who gets that kind of reception at the office?" he laughed. "It is such a great feeling to have such a wild reception for something that I love to do."

Prior to quitting his old job, Kovacs was always drawn to music, playing the odd gig here and there. He first began singing as a young boy, and while studying at a private American school in Brazil at the age of 14, Kovacs learned to play the guitar.

Kovacs wasn't just interested in music though. Returning to Canada to master in computer science at McGill University, he gravitated towards the theatre scene and was eventually cast in two films — the 1980 movie, Pick Up Summer, as well as My Bloody Valentine, which he said "actually became sort of a cult classic" in 1981.

"I made a lot of money in a very short time and just was a bum for a year. I listened to a lot of music," Kovacs said. "That is when I realized this is where I got to go. I knew that music was my calling."

In the meantime, Kovacs is preparing for a full slate of appearances in the area, scheduled to play at Fionn MacCool's on March 10, Ray's 3rd Generation Bistro on March 11 and 26, The Mad Hatter on March 12 and April 23, and the Black Birch Restaurant on March 19 and April 16. For more information, visit www.thomaskovacs.com.