

Straight, No Chaser - Jazz musician Matthew O'Halloran

by Carolyn Bennett

When the Fishwrapper asked jazz phenom Matthew O'Halloran about his sartorial style, the response was quintessentially Brockvillian. "I don't have much fashion game when it comes to casual clothing, but I always dress in a nice suit, shirt and shoes combo for musical and professional events."

Bville: Modest, but can bring it in a pinch.

Never you mind, the lad has flair on and off the keyboard. O'Halloran is an emerging artist on the Canadian music scene. He's currently studying at University of Toronto with jazz mentors Tania Gill, Andrew Downing, Hannah Barstow, and Terry Promane, to name a few. In June 2022, he was invited to perform in the Ottawa Jazz Festival Youth Series and the Youth Summit Rising Stars program, where he was one of two recipients of the reknowned Stingray Award. Recent gigs in T.O. include performing at the Emmet Ray, Middle8 in Yorkville, and the legendary Rex Hotel Jazz and Blues Bar. O'Halloran teaches piano with Lippert Music Centre and the Canada Music Academy in Toronto. The Fishwrapper caught up with O'Halloran via email.

FW: Who are your jazz inspirations?

MOH: My introduction to jazz was through the Oscar Peterson Trio when I was around 13 years old. I also listened to a lot of the Red Garland Trio and the Miles Davis Quintet early on. Since then, I've done a ton of listening to jazz. As musicians, that's our "homework". Lately, I've been digging into the music of Bill Evans and Sarah Vaughan, and present day artists Ambrose Akinmusire and Terri Lyne Carrington.



Matthew O'Halloran - check out Matthew's upcoming events at www.mohmusic.ca

I also have the chance to hear my professors and peers at UofT play quite regularly at school and around Toronto, and I'm inspired by their performances and their original compositions.

FW: Why jazz? Do you compose? Could Brockville support a jazz club?

MOH: I love jazz music because it's collaborative, improvised, and emotional. Brockville could support a jazz club if there was sufficient interest and attendance. It seems to me that other genres of music like pop, rock & country are more popular, jazz not so much, but of course it would be so cool if Brockville had a jazz club.

FW: What is the best thing about growing up in Brockville?

MOH: I was fortunate enough to be involved in many community activities, such as sports and music. I loved playing hockey, baseball, and performing in the Brockville Lions Club Music Festival. It's also a great place to be in the summer: walking and biking on the Brock Trail, chilling in the many parks along the river. In the winter, I love playing hockey at the Rotary Park outdoor rink.

FW: Where did you go to school? Where did you study music in Brockville?

MOH: I spent grades 7-12 at l'Académie catholique Ange-Gabriel. I remember my time there fondly; I had fun classmates and caring teachers. I'm where I'm at today because I had excellent music teachers (Malcolm Gillis and Bryne Carruthers), supportive parents, and opportunities from other musicians, educators and organizations in Brockville, including Samia O'Day and the Canada Music Academy, Judy Quick and the Brockville Lions Club Music Festival, Al Torrance and the Upper Canada Musicians Association, James MacKenzie; Terry O'Reilly; and many others. We are so fortunate to have all these phenomenal people and organizations right here in Brockville, and I would love to see more kids in Brockville taking lessons and playing music, by themselves and with each other.

FW: What is the first country you want to tour? Why?

MOH: I would love to start by

touring Canada. This country is my home and there are so many beautiful places in it that I have yet to explore, notably the provinces west of Ontario. I also have many European countries on my list, starting with the United Kingdom or France, since I speak the local languages and I've always wanted to visit them as a tourist and as a performing musician.

FW: Introvert or Extrovert?

MOH: Overall, I would label myself an extrovert. I love spending time with my family, playing music with my friends, and meeting new people.

FW: Back to your style. Fashion, in a pinch. Musically?

MOH: Musically, I don't yet have one defined style, but there's so much that we experience and learn with every year that goes by. I'm playing and listening to as much music as I can and I'm confident that I'm headed in the right direction to finding a musical voice that allows me to fully express myself and stand out as an individual.

You can catch Matthew in Toronto Saturday, April 1 at Supermarket Bar & Variety in Kensington Market, 268 Augusta Avenue. More of his upcoming dates can be found at www.mohmusic.ca

- Carolyn Bennett is a writer and comedian who splits her time between Brockville and Toronto.



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