

# Catch the Magic with Gypsy Moon

By Lorraine Payette



**H**ard, soft, slow, fast, up, down – name your mood and Gypsy Moon will slide right in and give you what you want to hear. At the heart of it all are two solid musicians and lifelong friends.

“Gypsy Moon plays everything including jazz, blues and classic rock,” says Jeff McMillan, Lead Vocals and Keyboard. “We’re good at reading our audience, giving them an opportunity to have a wonderful experience. We believe it is important to be fully aware of who we’re playing for. Everyone of any age deserves to feel Gypsy Moon has played the music just for them.”

Working together since the age of 12, Jeff McMillan and Gary Girden (Bass Guitar and Vocals) have had great experiences over the years.

Their first gig was a school dance, and this dynamic duo took the stage and let her rip. However, about three songs in, someone turned on the hi-fi and the band quietly put their instruments away. Not quite the beginning they were hoping for, but certainly not the end.

“Actually, they probably did us a favour,” says Girden. “We were 12-years-old, we really didn’t know more than about three songs at the time and the world wasn’t ready for us. Or maybe we weren’t ready for them.”

Stumbling blocks seemed to be everywhere. McMillan’s parents put him through classical piano training against the advice of teachers, who stressed that he had no talent. Equipment was expensive, so they improvised, making what they needed from other people’s cast offs.

Many bands would have quit right there, but not these boys. Music was their passion, and they would make it happen. Every step was a challenge, a learning opportunity, something not to be wasted.

“In our teens we played with an amazing band called White Pepper, and over time we have come together on many projects,” says McMillan. “We played country rock for a few years with Jim Wicks and Westburg Union before forming Gypsy Moon. It’s been a real privilege to be able to do this for as long as we’ve done it, and to always have fun with it.”

There were setbacks, disappointments, but nothing ever stopped them. Moving up from scrounged equipment to professional instruments, increasing their repertoire from those three early songs to several hundred, they have grown and enriched the local music scene, not only for themselves, but for their faithful fans as well.

They have performed with Katie Baker at the Joshua Bates Centre in Athens, worked as an opening act for artists including Jann Arden

and Trooper at Riverfest, and headlined at Kingston’s RMC Christmas Gala.

“Gypsy Moon has been together for over 20 years,” says McMillan. “Original members included Brent Martin, Jamie Savory, and Les Horvath as well as Gary and me. Others included Todd Jollimore, Morley Kimmel and Brian Collins, a great drummer, who was with us for close to ten years. Our current drummer is Frank DenOuden.”

While music is a wonderful job, it can wreak havoc on family life. However, for Gypsy Moon, this hasn’t been the case. Members’ families have always been highly supportive and understanding. Friends have been there every step of the way, and the band is truly grateful.

“We do our best to keep our families involved in what the band is doing,” says McMillan. “Frank and Gary’s wives always show up when possible to offer support for the band. It would be very difficult not having their support. Playing and rehearsing takes a lot of time away from the family.”

Formed in the 1990s, their children were born into the musical mix, and consider it to just be part of growing up. They thought it was cool that their dads were out playing in a band, doing something they truly loved. McMillan was a grade eight teacher, and being in a band certainly upped his status with his students.

Even at twelve-years-old, McMillan and Girden knew they had something special, something local audiences would listen to and come back to hear again. Although their first gig was for the Westminster school dance, they just kept going. When they became Gypsy Moon, they had their first performance at The Mill in Brockville, where they continue to play on a regular basis. They also play regularly at Sam’s Brass Rack on Perth Street in Brockville, and are great friends with the owners Sam Major & Art Labelle. In fact, they can’t say enough about them.

“When the Brass Rack first started, we’d come in and play for free just to help them get going,” says Girden. “And that’s what we’re about – helping out, having fun, doing what we can.”

“It’s always been a hobby for us,” says Girden. “No real expectations, not trying to go anywhere. It’s all for the love of music. Jeff has an all original blues CD out called ‘Jeff’s Got the Blues’ that people can purchase at Sam’s Brass Rack, or through the website at <http://gypsymoon.org/>. We’re doing what we love, for people we care about. It can’t get much better than that.” **LH**