



From left, Clubbing Fraggles guitar player/singer Gord Lane, drummer/singer Tim Epp and bass player/singer Rob Brotherston. (Photos by Tyler Clarke/The Brandon Sun)

# Musicians eager to play live again

BY TYLER CLARKE

After a year's downtime, a trio of sharp-dressed men is eager to kick out the jams — as soon as it's safe to do so, anyway.

Saturday marked one year since Tim Epp (drums/vocals), Gord Lane (guitar/vocals) and Rob Brotherston (bass/vocals) performed in front of an audience as the musical trio Clubbing Fraggles.

Around that time, the province was on the cusp of shutting down public events, and people were already beginning to feel uneasy about getting together for social gatherings.

Although they regard their final gig as a success, the aura of uneasiness, which included some people deciding not to attend due to recent travel, ended up proving a sign of things to come.

"Initially, we thought this would be three months, six months — whatever it's going to take, and it got longer and longer," Brotherston said. "Now we're just sitting it out — waiting."

"It turned into an endurance," Epp said. They got together as a band a few times during the past 12 months for rehearsals as restrictions allowed, but it has now been several months since they performed as a trio.

"Band members are somewhere between friends and family — they're in that gap somewhere — so I've missed hanging out with the guys, for sure," Brotherston said.



Brandon-based rock trio Clubbing Fraggles crank up the fun at The Dock during a New Year's Eve performance in 2017. From left is Gord Lane, Tim Epp and Rob Brotherston. (File)

All three bandmates have remained gainfully employed throughout the pandemic and stressed that as such, being unable to participate in their hobby of choice isn't on the top of anyone's list of priorities.

Still, the longing to hit the stage persists for the trio of musicians used to performing more than 30 shows per year, and they all agree they're far from alone in longing for the return of live music.

The band specializes in "playing for people who are enjoying themselves," Lane said. "They're forgetting about their week or what-

ever they have going on for a few hours — that's what it's all about."

Epp said looking out into the audience from behind his drum set and seeing a crowd of people enjoying themselves is the best part of each show.

An important key to any performance, he added, is selecting material the audience recognizes and treasures, often tapping into their nostalgia.

"Sweet Caroline" is always a sure-fire hit, he said, and people within a crowd build off of each other's excitement during this and other key

songs and contribute toward the building to an excitable crescendo.

"All it takes is somebody dancing," he said, the longing for public gatherings apparent in his enthusiastic tone. "If one person does it, then the floodgates open."

Clubbing Fraggles formed in 2007 as three guys who got together "probably as more of an escape to do whatever we wanted to do," Lane said, and later refined their set list to accommodate more commercial material general audiences tend to enjoy.

Their band's name is an homage to the '80s television series "Fraggle Rock," and the "Clubbing" could be interpreted to mean the show's mythical muppet creatures are partying, or being beaten with a club, Epp said with a chuckle.

The '80s reference was deliberate, since the main focus of their repertoire of more than 100 songs is rooted in that decade.

The band's adoption of matching '50s-era glasses, black ties and white dress shirts unsticks them from their decade of choice, but helps them stick out visually.

The local music scene has been extremely supportive throughout their more than decade-long stint performing everything from bar gigs to weddings and various things in-between, and Clubbing Fraggles is kept just as busy as they want to be.

Most years, anyway, with the trio of musicians finding themselves

saddled with extra free time during the pandemic.

They've found other activities to pass the time — Epp has been renovating a newly purchased house and Brotherston has taken up metal lathe work — but they're all keen to scrape the rust off and perform in front of people again.

"When we've been vaccinated we'll be heading back," Brotherston said. "The sooner the better."

It's difficult to say what, exactly, the local music scene will look like when the dust finally clears.

Some places, such as Prairie Firehouse, which Brotherston said they "loved playing," have closed during the pandemic, and it's uncertain how comfortable people will be going out in public again as the number of active COVID-19 cases gets lower.

After some initial reluctance among a public easing back into regular social conventions, all three agreed the desire and demand to get together in large groups will eventually build up to being stronger than it has been in recent memory.

"There's not one day where it'd go — Bam!" Epp said, adding the gradual easing back into social life is probably a good thing, since if it all came at once "you'd be pulling the hinges off the door" of places like The 40 — "It'd go wild!"

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