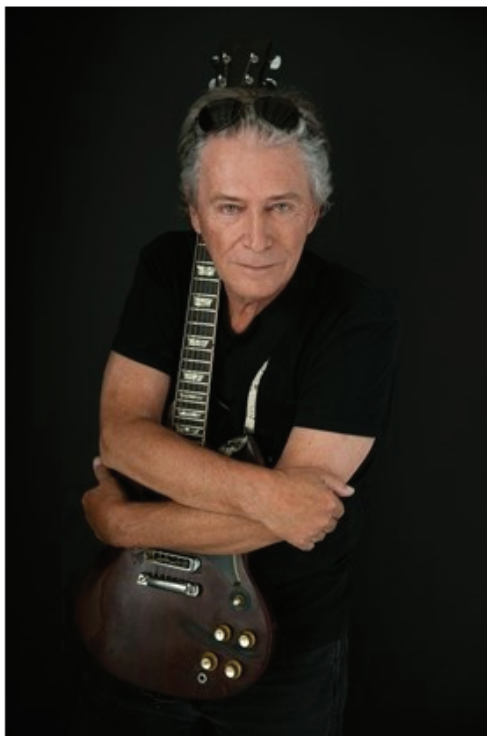


# McDonald puts decades of experience into CD

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Mike McDonald - MIRRORED MUSE IMAGERY-NADEZHDA

Mike McDonald loves to jam.

Be it his bi-weekly Boathouse happening, Mike's Monster Jam, or hauling his guitar and amp by streetcar to play all-night weekend sessions at The Global Village in Toronto in the late '60s and early '70s.

McDonald's wide circle of musical friends spans the country, from Vancouver to Halifax — where he is originally from.

A self-described "armed forces brat," McDonald got turned onto music by hearing late '50s/early '60s singer Dion.

"It was his song "Drip Drop" and another song called "Ruby Baby" — that Jimmy Reed lick. Any musician, you say Jimmy Reed lick and they all know what that means."

McDonald says the blues "fell into his lap" — absorbed by osmosis through the music that followed Elvis' explosion onto the scene.

Thanks to a friend's older brother's collection of blues, McDonald heard old American blues records, artists like Big Bill Broonzy, and Washboard Sam.

His first guitar was a beat-up old Stella miniature acoustic, then a Zenon electric "student-model guitar" one would buy in a department store like Eatons or Woolworths.

Around 1966-67 in the "Summer of Love," McDonald had a psychedelic-paint finish Telecaster. He got a job teaching at Scarboro Music and ordered his next guitar through the sales rep at the store.

It was his beloved Gibson SG guitar that has been by his side every note of the way since then.

As a guitar player, he cites Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton and Jeff Beck as the big three, in addition to "America's Eric Clapton," Mike Bloomfield.

He's not sure how many hours a day he would "immerse himself" slowing the record player to 16 r.p.m from 33 r.p.m. to learn Hendrix guitar parts. He also studied Gord Delmont's harmonic structure theory to familiarize himself with the physics and mathematics of music from graduating scales to different modes.

"You can play a different melody in a different genre and have the ears to know what to play and what not to play. Choosing your notes is very important."

McDonald jammed all over Toronto, which led to work playing with various bands including The Poor Souls where he learned to sing harmony, and Fingerwood, which led to a regular house gig in the Meat Market, located in the basement of Yonge Street's Colonial Tavern. During band breaks McDonald would meet the upstairs touring acts including Asleep at the Wheel, and Bobby Blue Bland.

"I sat and had a chat with HowlinWolf — he was a big man and scary. That's where I really got the introduction into that type of music," he recalls.

He has countless stories about those wild Yonge Street strip days as "the kid" and a "fixture on the streets," frequenting Grossman's and predominantly black club The Paramount Tavern.

In addition to being a musician McDonald, had a growing interest in the business of music. He got to know Grossman's owners, and ended up running the Grossman's Wednesday night jam for 13 years.

He says there were many Grossman's highlights but the one that stands out was the night Jimi Hendrix drummer Buddy Miles showed up with his entourage. McDonald invited him to jam "till sun up" where Miles "snapped" the bass drums pedals on the drum kit at the warehouse rehearsal hall that McDonald shared with Danny Marks, Edward Bear and Rough Trade.

McDonald, had an agent and did some recordings, but grew impatient waiting to "be discovered." He was also disenchanted by watching people get backslapped, then back-stabbed in a business with no guaranteed success.

He preferred to do gigs and get paid.

"Honestly I was never one to chase rainbows," he says. "I was more pragmatic because I was playing music for a living so I thought I had better learn how to earn a living playing music. It's really the luck of the draw and the connection. I thought I don't want to play that game. And I didn't."

He's made a few records including "Spadina Beat" with guitarist Pat Rush (Jeff Healey, Johnny Winter), which they sold at Grossman's.

He finally decided to do his debut CD for several reasons.

"I will be dead soon and I have written all kinds of stuff. I have written all these songs. And if nothing else, if it ever does make money it can go to my granddaughter."

Titled, "Play This," each song has a story from a specific time and place, from "Hock's Groovin' Bar Café," for Rick "Hock" Walsh from Downchild to "Whistle Blowin'"; a co-write featuring old Grossman's pal Gerald McAdam.

McDonald says the concept of Monster Jam (Number 50 is Aug. 20) has been in his head since those all-night jam sessions in The Global Village.

"I love to jam and there are all kinds of fabulous players out there. Jams should be approached with reckless abandon. Getting rid of that initial fear is everything — I have never had that fear because I have always been jamming. It also helps your ear and exposing yourself to new material helps your inner ear because you are able

to hear what to play and what not to play. That's very important. You can learn something from others that are more experienced if you go under the bus. The entitled people don't do that. They think I am just going to get up there and do what I know. No! Get up there and do what you don't know!"

McDonald is also an instructor at the Grand River Blues Camp.

Looking back he says "high points" in his career include being asked to play in Kandahar, Afghanistan, backing Burton Cummings with the The Carpet Frogs and Glass Tiger's Alan Frew. He was playing music for the troops and played hockey as part of 'Team Canada' at the base. McDonald has a picture of himself and "bivouac roomie," legendary NHL enforcer Tiger Williams, with the Stanley Cup between them.

Mike "Mudfoot" (meaning "things happen") McDonald says he keeps going for one reason: "I love music. I really do. What else am I going to do? It's not like I am going to start digging ditches!"

