



# Covid Visions

CUE SHEET

Mario Lepage, Johanna Bundon,  
+ Donny Parenteau

by  
**STEVEN ROSS SMITH**

 Saskatchewan  
Arts Alliance

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Mario LePage, 'Ponteix.' Photo Credit: Stephanie Kuse.

On June 21st, Musician Mario Lepage, who performs what he calls “indie-psych-pop music”, under the name ‘Ponteix’, drove from his hamlet of St. Denis to Regina, to perform a drive-in concert. With bandmates, Stacy Tinant and Jeffrey Romanyk, he played for an audience sitting in their cars in the parking lot at Pavillon Secondaire des Quatre Vents. They tuned in to an FM radio station, and enjoyed the live concert. This innovative idea was conjured by L’Association Canadienne Française de Régina. It’s a creative adaptation to these isolation days. For Lepage, it was a welcome opportunity to perform for a live, albeit oddly assembled,

crowd. This summer he would have been promoting his new and first album through tours in Quebec, France, and other locales. “It’s been a hard pill to swallow, when you consider that I was writing an album [Bastion] for three years, then working on a marketing plan for a year, and then understanding that all this was going down the drain.”

Adaptation has also been a mode for contemporary dance and theatre artist Johanna Bundon. She and her partner Jayden Pfeifer were negotiating a contract for a two-week on-site residency with Regina’s Neutral Ground and Dunlop galleries when COVID hit. “We had to work quickly with our collaborators. What was previously a series of live performances will be an online archive of research, and live streamed performances each day. That’s been a really big learning curve for sure – how to make our work translate to a digital form.”

The story is similar for Donny Parenteau, the accomplished multi-instrumentalist, extraordinary fiddler, songwriter and music teacher from Prince Albert. “When everything stopped, I went down to zero income.” He’s speaking of his tour bookings and his teaching of fiddle, guitar, mandolin, and vocals. The downturn spurred him to create an online component to performance and music teaching. He sees that he can have wider reach, engaging people for whom



travel or finances are a challenge. “I really want to focus on northern Saskatchewan. There’s so many great musicians up there. That’s one of my new goals, to contact the reserves and the schools.”

Lepage feels fortunate to have recently opened his ‘Studio Garage’, a music production space in St. Denis where he is also developing, in addition to his production services, a new skill: editing videos for musicians seeking to show their art on visual platforms. This facility enables work-at-distance and provides him with income and artistic expression, and fosters community.

In May Donny Parenteau was awarded a Legends and Legacy Award by the Saskatchewan Country Music Association. What was to be an event with a live audience suddenly shifted to a livestream platform. He found that performing to a camera lacked “that feedback of energy, the emotion coming back at you. If it was live, I guarantee I would have been crying.”

These are emotional, unnerving, challenging days for artists in all disciplines.



Johanna Bundon. Untitled Peter Tripp Project. Photo Credit: Lee Henderson 2018



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Donny Parenteau. <https://www.donnyparenteau.com/>

Lepage suggests that “we’re living in a very transitional period. It feels like a revolution in a way. I’m very much enjoying the humanness or humanity that’s going on. I’m grateful to be alive.”

Bundon is well aware of the unprecedented confluence of events of this spring. “With such an incredible shift against racism and colonial thinking, I’d like to feel how my practice could be changed by those ideas. I’m looking ahead toward new ways of expressing performance, and I’m also trying to take the time and really pause and feel this change and not try to fix it too quickly. There has been a little bit of sadness. It’s been really challenging to work with the unknown in the field of performance. But I see in myself and my colleagues that we have really amazing resilience.”

Parenteau offers advice: “Don’t take for granted what you have. You have to be optimistic, you’ve got to look at the positive in everything. This is the first summer [many musicians] have been able to spend



Steven Ross Smith is a poet and arts writer. He has written for literary and arts publications across the country. Over three decades, has crafted the innovative six-book poetic series *fluttersong*. He has just completed a two-year term as Banff Poet Laureate. His work appears in print, audio and video in Canada, USA, and abroad. He lives and writes in Saskatoon.

with their families every weekend. So enjoy your time. This is your reboot in life.”

If there’s a day when all restrictions are lifted, and it seems safe, Mario Lepage says, “I’m going to give some hugs to a handful of people, and I’ll probably book some tours. I’ll be very eager to play music in front of audiences.”

“In dance, we’re working with space and touch,” Johanna Bundon reflects, “so I feel my nervous system to be quite changed without those connections. I look forward to being in a studio space with my colleagues.”

Donny Parenteau eagerly awaits that day. “I’ll do a show even if I have to put it on myself, and I’m going to hug my band members a little bit harder.”