

Canadian musical icon returns to roots

Gino Vannelli plays Brampton's Rose Theatre on March 11

Since his debut release of *Crazy Life* in 1973, Gino Vannelli has remained one of the most distinctive voices in contemporary music. And now, he's back with *The Best And Beyond!* The Canadian singer earned worldwide acclaim with a number of Top Ten hits, including "I Just Wanna Stop," "Living Inside Myself," "Black Cars," "People Gotta Move," and "Wild Horses," and many more.

Vannelli plays the Rose Theatre in Brampton on Friday March 11.

The Best And Beyond includes new versions of all these big hits, all re-recorded for 2010. It's a fresh twist on the songs that catapulted him to the world stage. He took to the studio to revitalize his older material and even write his own book about the past, present and future for an expanded edition of the *Best And Beyond* CD/Book package. In his words, "it is much more a statement of my present-day musical mindset, not to mention some incredible musicianship.

Gino Vannelli is one of the most distinctive voices in contemporary music.

Born in Montreal in the summer of 1952, Vannelli grew up in a family headed by his cabaret-singing father and a 'keen-eared' mother. Instinctively drawn to jazz, drummers in particular, such as Gene Krupa, Buddy Rich, Joe Morello, Ed Thigpen and Elvin Jones, as a child Vannelli studied drums and music theory for five years. Gino's first foray into pop music came one afternoon as a group of young drummers stood in line, waiting to take turns to audition for a Montreal East group called the Cobras.

The rite of passage involved playing a tune called "Wipeout" by the Ventures. Having never heard the song before, Gino made sure he waited to the very last, studying the parts every aspiring drummer played (or was trying to play) That afternoon, Gino came home a little later than usual from school, but as the official drummer for the Cobras. A year later, with his brother Joe holding down the keyboard chair, Vannelli headed up the Motown-influenced Jacksonville 5 (note, this is five years before the Jackson 5 recorded their first record). Along the way there were guitar and piano lessons. The urge to compose words and music followed not long after.

At fourteen, Gino began his official singing career when the singer in the band fortuitously couldn't make the high water mark in a then popular tune by a gritty Welshman, Tom Jones, called *It's Not Unusual*.

To add complication, as well as interest to his musical affinities, Gino had fallen in love with classical music French Impressionism, Italian Opera, and 20th century Russian composers in particular. Attending concerts given by the Montreal Symphony every last Thursday of the month for one semester, had proven to be life-changing (his 2000 release of *Canto* being testament).

"I seemed to have had a double standard, or at least torn between a few distinct sounds and styles," reflects Vannelli. "I used to defend Charlie Watts and Ringo Starr, insisting they were part of something new and exciting to my purist, jazz-head friends. Yet, when I'd listen to Dave Brubeck's *Time Out*, or Miles Davis's *Birth of the Cool*, pop would suddenly plead no contest well, at least for that moment. One Thursday afternoon at Place Des Arts, I remember hearing the Montreal Symphony playing "Daphne and Chloe" by Maurice Ravel. I walked away shaking my head, muttering to myself, 'What was that!?' I was so deeply moved and bewildered by the sounds I had just heard. It was the moment I discovered to what heights music could draw a man's soul."

Before his seventeenth birthday, Vannelli had signed with RCA Records of Canada, releasing a single called "Gina Bold" under the pseudonym Van- Elli." Ambitious and now bitten by the music industry bug, Gino lived on and off in New York City, making the record company and publisher's rounds, finally ending up at the foot of the Gates of A&M Records in Hollywood three years later. Gino, accompanied by his brother Joe, and down to their last five-dollar bill, made one last ditch effort to get signed before having to trek back to Montreal. Early

one morning, Gino headed out to the offices of A&M Records where he waited outside the gates for any sign of company co-owner Herb Alpert.

As Alpert was walking through the parking lot hours later, Vannelli ran past the gates, racing by a startled and furious security guard. Before he could be accosted he begged a slightly apprehensive Alpert for a chance to audition. Acting on a hunch, (and much to the guard's annoyance) Herb was sympathetic, telling the young hopeful to return later that afternoon. Gino proceeded to play songs on his acoustic guitar he had recently written, including "People Gotta Move," "Crazy Life," "Mama Coco," "Powerful People" and "Lady songs that would end up on the six albums Vannelli would record for A&M between 1974 and 1978. That very day, Gino was welcomed as a new member of the A&M family.

Five of those six albums made the top 100 Billboard album charts, culminating with Brother to Brother (co-produced by brothers Joe, and Ross) which achieved a coveted Top 10 position in the fall of 1978. ("I Just Wanna Stop" making it to the 4th spot on the Billboard singles chart).

Forever the impassioned artist, Vannelli's A&M albums consisted of a range of material: from experimental synthesizer arrangements, live orchestral pieces, jazz inflected tunes, to contemporary R&B inspired songs. Having toured with Stevie Wonder, (which led to Gino's notable appearance on Soul Train a first for a white artist) Gino soon became a headlining artist, selling out concerts halls and arenas in Canada and the U.S. by twenty-three years of age. Earning a handful of Grammy nominations, and numerous Juno Awards in his native Canada, Gino had arrived.

In 1980, Vannelli signed with Arista Records. His sole Arista album, Nightwalker, provided him with a top-ten pop hit, "Living Inside Myself."

A successful North American artist, through some strange twist of fate, had suddenly landed feet first on the world stage. To this day, he continues to have a large, international following, giving concerts from Chicago to Cape Town.

By 1990, Vannelli had grown skeptical and weary of the music industry status quo, (and the Hollywood mindset).

After throwing himself headlong into the study of the humanities, a careful examination of world religions, philosophies, both Eastern and Western, he decided it was time to move his family north to Oregon. "I decided to pull myself out of the mainstream," he explains, "and roam the banks."

Signing with Verve Records, both VannelJohn Paul. Soon after the show had forming new associations.

Gino Vannelli's standing as a powerful and innovative live performer, his well hewn musical skills as composer, poet, producer and arranger, (his engaging persona notwithstanding) keep his career rising to greater heights. "The best works lie in the wake of reaching."

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