

Musicians struggling with lack of gigs

**Mike Balsom
Special to The Local**

Dave Norris can count on one hand the number of Saturday nights he's had off over the past 14 years. Same thing for the past six years of Friday nights.

The plug was pulled for the weekend residency at the Old Winery, and Norris heard the news just before climbing behind his drum kit Friday, March 13. He says it was "a little like playing on the Titanic" that night.

The long-time member of the Niagara Rhythm Section (Saturdays) and the Old Winos (Fridays) is adjusting to the absolute sudden stop in the live music scene due to COVID-19.

"From full blast — I had a Sunday afternoon gig as well — so I had three gigs every weekend, and just zero right now," says

Applications for that benefit, however, won't open until April 6, and the first payout may take up to a month to arrive.

In the meantime, many within Goldberger's circle of musicians are throwing themselves into studio work, and teaching music lessons online, to make up for the lost income from cancelled gigs. As well, many have day jobs that, unlike Norris, they can continue working at during the pandemic.

"Everyone's learning how to Skype," adds Goldberger. "They're doing podcasts, and making live videos from home."

Goldberger has taken the step of hosting a live webcast from his Shed Studio in back of his Niagara-on-the-Lake home. Back on March 21, Goldberger hosted Live from the Shed Studio— Episode 1 on Facebook



Steve Goldberger, Dave Norris and Mike Glatt are missing the opportunity to play live music together. (Photo supplied)

“ I think it will bounce back, and maybe be better than ever. ”

Steve Goldberger

Norris. "The option of working from home doesn't exist for me, and it just brings everything to a crashing halt."

Norris adds that his day job, installing window film, has also been put on hold, leaving him with no income during the current shut-down of all bars and restaurants.

Bandleader Steve Goldberger is also adjusting.

"It's bizarre. The first Saturday night we had off was very odd," says Goldberger. "I just feel really bad for the other guys, the actors, the musicians who are just trying to earn a living."

Both Goldberger and Norris agree that a few weeks off would be easy to handle. But with so much uncertainty surrounding the question when things will be back to normal, it could be disastrous to a lot of independent artists.

There has been some positive news for musicians and others working in what has become known as the 'gig economy.' The new Canada Emergency Response Benefit, announced by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on March 25, allows contract workers and self-employed individuals, like Goldberger and Norris, to apply for up to \$2,000 per month for four months, for work lost due to the virus.

and YouTube.

"I've wanted to do this for years," Goldberger explains — a show like Live from Daryl's House (hosted by Daryl Hall of Hall & Oates fame, where the host invites friends over to play). Now with all this downtime, I can, but last week, when I did mine, (because of social distancing), no one wanted to come over."

So Goldberger pushed outside of his comfort zone, and hosted a 15-minute live session, playing two original songs and a Joni Mitchell composition. It's available to view on Facebook and his YouTube channel.

He promises to do another one, but as both he and Norris assert, for them, it's all about playing with other musicians. Besides, says Norris, who wants to tune in to a drummer playing a solo webcam show?

Goldberger has also been shuffling through his video archives, pulling up old footage of the Niagara Rhythm Section dating back to the early 2000s. Long-time fans of the group can relive a special evening from 2009 that took place at the Anchorage. The hour-long show features the usual cast of characters, along with the likes of Mark Lalama, Graham Lear and Tim Hicks, whose profile as a country artist has risen immensely over the past five years.

"I've had that on DVD, it's never been online, it was basically for ourselves," says Goldberger. "I downloaded some software that allows you to convert video into internet format, and I thought it would be fun for people to have a look at this."

"It's a good time-killer," he adds, "it's over an hour

long. It's fun seeing some friends who have passed on, and just seeing the crowds that we used to get there."

In addition to the videos, Goldberger is spending some of the downtime in his studio, mixing a new release from Welland singer-songwriter Gravely James. He's also been very

vocal, via Facebook and his weekly emails, in urging his fans and followers to continue supporting local establishments in whatever way possible.

Looking to the future, both musicians are optimistic that when terms like social distancing and self-isolation become a

thing of the past, the live music scene will come back with a vengeance.

"Once people feel safe to go out, and to congregate again," predicts Goldberger, "I think it will bounce back, and maybe be better than ever. To quote Joni Mitchell, we don't know what we got 'til it's gone."

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