

# Local ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

## Local musician happy to be playing before live audiences

**Mike Balsom**  
Special to The Local

Niagara-on-the-Lake musician Steve Goldberger has been slowly getting back in front of live audiences over the past month as he awaits word on a possible return to regular weekend gigs at The Old Winery.

Goldberger is appearing at Niagara Falls bar Local (we love the name of that bar!) this Friday, Nov. 12, alongside Andrew Aldridge and fellow NOTL musician Penner MacKay.

Those regular weekend gigs have been Goldberger's lifeblood since 2012. Until the pandemic closed things down, the two collections of local musicians welcomed guests from Niagara and across Ontario for evenings of roots-based music (Fridays with the Old Winos) and Blues and R&B jam sessions (Saturdays with the Niagara Rhythm Section). It's never been the same set twice.

For Goldberger, 18 months is the longest time he's gone without performing for an audience in his entire musical career. And

the unplanned layover has created some unique challenges for the band leader and bassist.

For starters, this upcoming gig and others will see Goldberger putting down his bass and picking up a guitar, something he rarely does with the Winos and the NRS.

He's played a few of these duo performances with Aldridge since September, and has had to adjust to playing the six-string rather than the four.

"It's a different thickness of strings," he laughs. "They cut into my bass calluses. It hurts even more. I've been trying to play guitar every day now with these gigs coming up just to get my act together."

"It's totally out of my comfort zone," Goldberger continues. "I like to push and challenge myself with different things. And I'm singing, and talking about every song beforehand. For most of my career, I've been in bands where other people sing."

Speaking of those bass calluses, with 40-plus years as a professional musician,

they become part of a bass player's make-up, as natural as the hair on your arms. But with month after month of inactivity, Goldberger found that he had to redevelop them as he began to step back onto the stage.

A September outdoor gig on a nearby farm gave him an opportunity to gather the Gentle Spirits band featured on his 2018 album. Back on the bass for that one, he immediately noticed the effects of such a long layoff.

"Playing a whole night, my fingers were killing me," he marvels. "It's a different intensity than playing a song or two here (in his Shed Studio), or just sitting around."

As well, he's been busy trying to design the perfect two-hour set list for Friday night, in collaboration with Aldridge, whom Old Winos fans will recognize as a frequent guest. For someone with such a long career in the music industry, narrowing things down is a bigger challenge than he thought it would be.

"You want to play some covers that people know," Goldberger explains, "so I made myself a list of about

150 songs I can do. Now how do I narrow that down to maybe 25? I just eliminated five songs last night. I'm going to play a bunch of originals that I do, and some new ones too."

Just getting the chance to get out there and play some of these smaller gigs has been another challenge for the affable Goldberger. Having a regular residency here in NOTL for about 20 years, he hasn't had to do a lot of cold-calling.

"I've been on the phone calling bars again," he laughs. "It feels weird. 'Hi, I'm Steve, I have this band.' I haven't had to do that for a long time."

It's helped him put his career into perspective, especially this latest stretch that has revolved around his living in NOTL for 20 years.

"I really appreciate what we've had," Goldberger says. "To be able to play both nights, and to play with this long line-up of great guests. But at the same time, I thought I would die without regular gigs, and here I still am."

He goes on to reflect on his days playing with To-

ronto-based bluegrass-folk group Black Creek, touring all over the province. One week they had a six-night residency in Kingston, but at the same time had booked a high school gig in Cornwall.

"We left Kingston in the afternoon, drove to Cornwall, got to the high school, unloaded and set everything up. The principal walked in and said 'who are you?' We told him we were Black Creek and were booked to play at the school. He said 'no, you're not, you must be booked at the other school.' So we had to break it down and high-tail it to the other place and do it all over again."

Then, of course, they had to make it back to Kingston for their evening set that same day.

Those were heady times, but he was much younger back then. Recent invitations to join a fellow musician at a recording studio in Pickering, and another for an Ottawa opening slot for legendary Canadian guitarist David Wilcox, aren't met with as much enthusiasm as they would have perhaps 20 or 30 years ago.

He and Rob Glatt have been in talks about getting the Old Winos and Niagara Rhythm Section back on the Old Winery stage for their Friday and Saturday night residency.

"They've been cautious," he says, "and I think until they can comfortably have full capacity, there's no point, as it's such a small place. We might start with booking a few special events first before going back to the regular gigs."

He's chomping at the bit to be back on that stage. He admits to some jitters about being the main focal point in these more intimate settings, but he's having lots of fun trying this new format with just one or two accompanists.

Steve Goldberger, Andrew Aldridge and Penner MacKay can be seen at Local, on Main Street in Niagara Falls this Friday, Nov. 12, at 9:30 p.m. Goldberger will also be playing with his longtime NRS partner Steve Grisbrook at Peter Piper's on Highway 20 in Fonthill Sunday, Nov. 21, for their Jimmy's Juke Joint Blues Party matinee at 2 p.m.



Steve Goldberger is in his studio playing guitar, something most fans don't get to see very often. (Mike Balsom)