

Sea of Gold and Burgundy recorded at Shed Studio

Mike Balsom
The Local

Niagara Falls-based band A Sea of Gold and Burgundy have found a kindred spirit in Niagara-on-the-Lake musician and producer Steve Goldberger.

Never mind the obvious similarities between the producer's name and the trio's, which was derived, by the way, from the members' names: C.D. Onofrio (the 'Sea') Nathaniel Goold (the 'Gold') and Aaron Berger (the 'Burgundy').

"It's pretty crazy," Onofrio tells The Local during a private listening session at Goldberger's NOTL studio. "It's the perfect name for our producer. I think it was Nathaniel who put it all together."

"Steve tried to steal our copyright," laughs Berger.

The good-natured, joking atmosphere during the listening session reflects the working relationship that developed between Goldberger and the band over more than six months of jamming, rehearsing, recording and mixing that began in December 2022.

Though the group had met Goldberger a number of times at various gigs on the Niagara music scene, they had never had a chance to collaborate. Goldberger took the initiative to invite them to work with him. "We had 10 songs when we got here," Berger says. "It began with Steve just jamming with us, and he became the one who chose the songs for this project."

"They were pretty together with their vocals when they arrived," Goldberger says of the trio known for their intricate three-part harmonies. "I ended up choosing the songs that they knew really well, the ones they didn't even need lyric sheets for. I figured that would be a great place to start working with them."

Goold says it took the band

about eight sessions at the Shed to lay down the tracks for the four songs. "It went really well," he adds. "Every time we came to do tracking we hit on pretty much exactly what we wanted to do. It went really quick. When we got into the mixing and all the back and forth, it slowed down and took a little more time."

Berger, Onofrio and Goold originally formed A Sea of Gold and Burgundy more than a decade ago. Their self-titled 2011 debut album is a slice of folk rock Canadiana that would fit in nicely on a playlist with City and Colour, Great Lake Swimmers and Neil Young.

The band went separate ways shortly after that album release, but during the COVID years, the three long-time friends happened to attend a gathering where their creative spark became rekindled. Last year they released an EP called *Ghosts in These Walls*, a collection of four introspective, dark acoustic songs that laid bare feelings of despair and depression.

Conversely, the new four-song EP, tentatively called *Golden Horizons*, takes a complete 180-degree turn. All four songs are joyous, upbeat and positive. Rather than looking back at loss and regret, the tracks look forward with excitement about what's to come.

Written by Berger, *I Will Abide*, the first song on the EP, is reminiscent of the Southern California sound of the mid-'70s, with an uptempo, Jackson Browne or Eagles driving rhythm. Jangly guitars open the number, and a swirling organ sound punctuates the back-up harmonies.

"The drums really drive that song," Goold says, giving much credit to drummer TJ Rogers, like Goold, a veteran of a number of local bands. "We had talked about tempos for each of the songs. He really nailed it."

"I wrote it just before my

son Owen was born," says Berger. "It's from the father's perspective, a reassurance to my family that I will stand by them. We're a lot older than we were when we were first together. It talks of the big shift we've had when it comes to where we are in our lives and what's important to us."

Golden Horizons (That's Alright) takes A Sea of Gold and Burgundy into a very different sonic direction. It opens with a funky bass line before drums and percussions come in to set up an almost calypso style beat. Goold rips off an amazing solo on the bass guitar, while Laurel Minnes and Zan Dominick join in on background vocals on the second half.

"I want to kiss the sunrise, I want to hold the setting sun," sings Onofrio. "I want to press my lips and kiss the golden horizon."

It's a positive, feel-good sing-along and a sure-fire perfect dance-floor filler for the band's future live sets.

"C.D. wrote it, and right off the bat it came out sounding very islandy," Goold says. "MJ (Matthew James Blake) did the percussion. He's a master of everything, and he's on every song."

Onofrio also penned track three, the piano-driven *Big Sky*. Goold takes the lead vocal and plays piano, organ and harmonica. It's another joyous song about freedom, about looking to the possibilities of the future.

"Don't you worry about me," Goold sings, "I'm just looking for a big sky to set me free. Breathe in, breathe out, don't you worry what it's all about."

"It's yearning for transcendence," adds Berger.

The EP concludes with *Take the Bad*. It's a song Goold wrote and recorded many years ago with his folk-roots band the Black Flies. *Take the Bad* slows the tempo down a



Nathaniel Goold, Aaron Berger, C.D. Onofrio, and producer Steve Goldberger in the Shed Studio in NOTL. (Mike Balsom)

bit. Rogers brushes the drums softly and acoustic guitars are up front in the mix. Lyrically, Goold sings about taking the bad and making something good out of it. The three singers push the limits with their vocal interplay on this one.

"It took me a little while to get used to the fact that these guys don't sing traditional harmonies," Goldberger says. "Sometimes they're doing alternate notes, they don't do the

obvious. I came to realize that I just had to shut up. This is their sound, I just had to let go and let them be themselves."

Goldberger's production works perfectly on each of the group's four songs. He provides the aural punch where necessary. It's obvious he stepped back and let the band take things where they wanted it to go, while adding the bells and whistles exactly where they were needed.

"We really appreciate Steve's creative philosophy," Onofrio confirms. "The whole process was very enjoyable. There was a spirit of being in the laboratory at times, seeing what kind of chemistry comes about"

A Sea of Gold and Burgundy plans to release each of the four tracks to all streaming services once a month, starting with *I Will Abide* on July 29. An EP release party is being planned for October.



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Saturday night's downpour didn't dampen the spirits at TD Niagara Jazz Festival's Jazz Under the Stars event at the Jackson-Triggs Estate's amphitheatre. As the skies opened up, headliner Laila Biali invited audience members who were sitting exposed to the elements up to the relatively dry stage, where she continued to perform with her band. It was a magical, memorable and fitting way to kick off the festival's summer concert series in celebration of its 10th anniversary. Next up for the festival is Soul Jazz in the Vineyard with Cinnamon Jones and the Quincey Bullen Quartet at The Hare Wine Co. on Thursday, July 20. (Jeff Friesen for the TD Niagara Jazz Festival)

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