

AL BRANT

Al Brant writes music that is soulful, reflective and life affirming.

Four years ago, after 16 years of juggling part-time work, family relationships, and touring around Canada as a band vocalist, Al Brant was at a crossroads. He almost quit his music career — not for lack of talent or love for music — but for financial reasons. He was tempted to give in to "get-a-real-job" pressure. Upon reflection, he realized that he could never give up music because it's an essential expression of who he is. Following his decision to stay with music, he was hired as an itinerant musician at the University of Alberta Hospital, as part of their *Artists-on-the-Wards* program.

Al has always been a natural at connecting with people. That skill facilitates his intimate style of performing and recording. It also served him well in his earlier sales career, but in sales it was about connecting in order to sell something. However, in his hospital work, connecting with people is his sole focus, and his music helps to do that with people who are at their most vulnerable. "Music is a bridge," he says. "It helps start a conversation; it can be comforting; it can bring up memories and trigger emotions."

"My work at the hospital has changed me as a human," he says. "It has made me more aware, intuitive, and compassionate. My hospital experience is rich, and sometimes the people I meet and the stories I hear provide material and inspiration for new songs. My work also keeps my voice and guitar skills in shape."

Al is a self-taught musician; he feels he has to work hard at writing songs. That's partly due to his quest to become more and more honest: to be "Wide Open." "Song-writing helps me feel out my world; it helps me understand things. I work through things in my songs," he says. The music Al writes is soulful, reflective, and life-affirming. His pieces are uncluttered, create images, and draw feelings from his listeners.

Al grew up in a household that held music in high regard. His mother is a classically trained opera singer who studied in New York. Although her career took a back seat to raising four kids, she passed on to her progeny a love of music. One of Al's earliest influences was his guitar-playing brother, who introduced him at a young age to *Neil Young*, *The Beatles* and *The Straws*. Listening to these artists created in Al a great desire to write and sing his own songs.

Al's first foray into the Edmonton music scene was as one half of the duo **Brant and Skelly**. They performed at a local talent contest and caught the ear of award-winning producer *George Blondheim*. The result was a three-song demo and a desire to keep recording.

It was through George that Al met *Eddie Patterson (Hometown Band, Bobby Taylor & the Vancouvers, Hans Staymer)*. Eddie was impressed with Al's vocal abilities and asked if he would perform with his jazz fusion project. This exposure to live improvisation of vocals and lyrics truly expanded Al's musical horizons.

Al released his first solo album, **Let It Fly**, in 1991, with Patterson and friends John Armstrong (bass) and Kelly Pikula (drums). In 1996, he released a Factor-supported recording produced by Jamie Kidd: **Al Brant & The Waterbirds**. This recording earned glowing reviews and regular airplay on CKUA and CBC radio.

The birth of Al's second daughter around this time brought an increased focus on family life, although Al continued to write and record with The Stone Merchants/SMAC (who have released four recordings over the past five years: **Live in the Living Room; have another blue juice, mister; YigiYigi; and vox Populi**) and with *Tacoy Ryde* (one of western Canada's longest running bands, recently celebrating 38 years on the Canadian music scene). Tacoy Ryde's most recent recording is their 2003 album, **Here's the Picture**. Brant's songwriting talents continue to garner accolades, and in 2003 he received an Honourable Mention in the international John Lennon Songwriting Contest.

Since the conception of **The Christmas Carol Project** a decade ago, Al has written songs for and performed annually in this musical version of the classic Dickens tale, along with other Edmonton-based musicians including *Maria Dunn, Bill Bourne, Dale Ladoucer, Tom Roschkov, Terry Morrison, Ken Brown* and *Kevin Cook*. Bellstruck Productions Inc. in association with CHUM Television has now produced a televised version of the show, which aired on City TV, Access, A-Channel and Bravo! across Canada in December 2006.

Al has also been involved for several years with Arts in Healthcare. As a contracted "Artist on the Wards," he writes and performs his songs for patients at one of Canada's largest hospitals.

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