

# Brian Gladstone Transforms His Career to Seek His Musical Roots

*Brian Gladstone was a well-respected electrical engineer, but when his "Roots" music grounding called him to return he could not resist.*

MARTIN C. WINER

**B**rian Gladstone was an accomplished, self-taught electrical engineer specializing in the design of electrical transformers. However, the power that coursed through Brian's veins was grounded in the acoustic tones of "Roots" music — the root which holds Folk, Blues, and other soulful types of music as branches. Electricity is well known for returning to the earth. After a lifetime of stringing through the high-tension world of engineering, he felt he had built up enough musical potential to return to his roots.

His debut album "Back to the Dirt" — produced (appropriately) in his basement studio — was released in 1999. Within three years of its release, the album had achieved international radio play and critical acclaim. Brian credits his success to a positively charged resolve and says that, despite some predictable moments of self doubt, it never occurred to him that he wouldn't succeed. Over the next few years, Brian added three albums to his discography. From

a purely financial perspective, Brian says, "You'd have to be crazy to pursue a career in roots music." Whereas electricity follows the path of least resistance, Brian chose to forgo a lucrative career, trading financial reward for spiritual fulfillment. His choice seems obvious when watching him play; one sees the deep-seated contentment of someone existing in the place they were meant to be.

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A transformer is a device which can channel and greatly amplify electrical potential energy flowing through it. At the same time he was having personal successes in having his music amplified over radio waves, he established a non-profit foundation, Artists for a Better World — a non-political cadre of musicians dedicated to promoting change through music. Brian's motto for the group is: "We can use our voice to change the world; there is magic in our words." The organization has produced seven CDs of socially conscious music, including "Protest Songs" Volumes I and II. Constantly

seeking young and fresh Roots talent, Brian's organization works to amplify and conduct the genre towards wider appreciation.

A centerpiece of Brian's community work is his running of the Winterfolk Festival, a largely free festival with six stages spotlighting local and emerging Roots talent. In its eighth year, the festival will run from February 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> this year, with family-oriented entertainment centered around the Broadview and Danforth area. This year's festival will feature over 100 artists, including Juno Award talent such as Julian Fauth, Al Lerman (of Fathead), Bob Snider, and Danny Marks. The festival was also the first festival for now-acclaimed artists Serena Ryder and the band Dala.

Brian grew up in North York during the '60s at a time when counterculture and culture were virtually synonymous. His generation, he says, "is witness to the power of youth and music to bring about change." Toronto has a very proud Roots history, the Yorkville area in the '60s having been a hub for Roots artists. The Riverboat club, amongst others, hosted legends such as Joni Mitchell, Phil Oaks, Jackson Browne, Gordon Lightfoot, and Jerry Jeff Walker. Brian's music grows distinctly out of that era

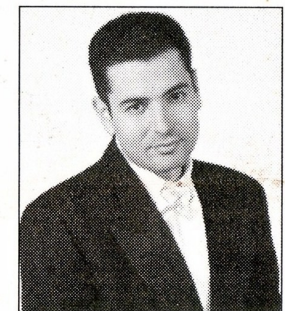


*Organizer and artist Brian Gladstone at the Winterfolk Festival*

with continuing allegiance to Toronto. Brian offers a lyrical lament on his first album, which will connect with Torontonians both musically and in its message: "I got stuck behind an 18-hour line of nuts and screws ... Well there ain't much that you can do when you've got the Don Valley Blues." Fortunately, the only jams in Brian's career are musical ones where he continues to write, record, tour, and promote local music.

Winterfolk Festival: <http://www.abetterworld.ca/p-winterfolk-viii/>

Brian Gladstone: <http://www.backtothedirt.com/>



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