

Great big name coming to local stage

By Sarah Sobanski

'I'll never play a rink again. In a hockey rink you dumb it down, it's not about the music, it's about the party.'

The Great Big Sea's Sean McCann has stepped out from the shadow of the 'shanti-man'.

'This is a victory lap. This is my new buzz, being on stage is the one bad habit I can't give up,' said McCann from the road in Vancouver Island last week. 'I'm starting from zero. We all had our roles and we played them [in the Great Big Sea]. We were acting. It was a party band. I'm starting from zero, but over the past two years, every show has led to two or three more.'

McCann left Great Big Sea when he came to terms with the fact that he was an alcoholic. He'll be five years sober on Nov. 9, 2016.

McCann is celebrating by touring the country and lighting up small, intimate venues.

'As long as people want to hear my story and want to see me that's a win,' said McCann, explaining that during his show he interacts with the audience by connecting with them and sharing his battle with alcohol abuse. He invites audience members to sing along, make requests and laugh with him on his journey. 'I'll do requests but I'm not in character as the shanti-man. I'm Sean; I'm the survivor. That's who I am.'

The Carbonear, Nfld. born musician discovered the Village Playhouse while driving through Bancroft. He stopped and took a photo of the building to take home and research. He said he had heard about the strong arts and music community in Bancroft and he wanted to be a part of it.

'My future is where people care enough and are paying attention enough to show up and have that exchange. It seems to matter more in small towns than it does in large ones,' said McCann. 'I love playing small towns. I love it when there's a smaller venue that brings a town together.'

McCann will perform Friday, Oct. 14 at the Playhouse with Kingston born multi-instrumentalist Chris Murphy, a long-time friend.

McCann said he couldn't have made it to where he is now without the support of friends, and the people who reached back to connect with him after listening to his first solo album *Help Yourself*.

'Thousands and thousands of people were saying that they could relate. [They said] that song is my mother, that song is my brother. We feel like we're isolated and we feel like we're alone,' McCann explained of the community of those who are afflicted by addiction. 'Having people react to those personal songs, without that response I wouldn't have made it.'

He added, 'Your drinking buddies are your drinking buddies. When the liquor's gone so are they. That's not nice to say but that's how it is. A secret can kill you. The only way to defeat a secret is to tell.'

McCann referred to himself as an 'interactive heart-melter.' He's drawn inspiration from Bob Marley, Johnny Cash and The Clash. He said he wanted to share his music, reach into the chest cavity of Bancroft and squeeze a little. He wants the night to be cathartic and fun all at the same time.

'Let's have a great time, let's gather together.'