

The Art Barn Songwriter Series: Brian Sances And Hugh McGowan

By MATTHEW MURPHY

Hugh McGowan and Brian Sances turned a cold January Monday evening into a warm and rich experience of original music as part of the Art Barn Songwriter Series at the Cotuit Center for the Arts. The series brings two professionally touring songwriters to the Cotuit Center on the second and fourth Monday of every month, giving both local and regional artists a showcase in an intimate performance space.

Mr. McGowan hails these days from Somerville. He is a fixture in the Boston music scene, fronting bands to drumming and bartending. He plays standing, bouncing back and forth, belting out his own cadence through a bright crisp rhythm guitar. He plays complicated chord patterns while powering out his vocals, often at full throttle. Mr. McGowan sings about love.

He began with "This Place is Hers." He sang it like a man whose words tumble over each other, excited and in love. There is little subtlety in his songs. Each song paints a clear picture of the object of his passion and how he experiences that passion. "Cheshire" had an appropriate Monkees' or English invasion-style rhythm and sound. His love appears before him smiling like the Cheshire cat. He performed with a unique unity of his body, voice, lyrics, and guitar, filling the room with the images of his lyrics.

Each song had its own unique character, his voice a representation of his heart. His rock, folk, Irish, pop, and progressive music influences were apparent all evening. His energy came through in every song, as he drew the audience in.

Mr. McGowan played some songs from his CD, "Crow's Nest." As someone whose romance is more gray than lighted by wonder, it was soothing to reminisce as he shared his vivid sense of the nape of a woman's neck, being "lost in her curls," or the melancholy of returning to the airport bar to have the bartender ask him, "Only one drink, someone left you?"

In "Sense of It All," he is on a dance floor and his heart is like a "puppet loosening his strings, cutting up paper and fashioning wings, throwing the rocks in his pocket aside, for fear they will weigh him down."

Brian Sances has lived in Sandwich since the 3rd grade. He has fronted several local bands including From the Ground Up, Shotgun Bandits, and Tripl3Crown. His lyrics reflect a profound sense of connection and understanding well beyond his 28 years. He sings about

his life on the Cape and, with his familiar accent and vocal tone, he makes almost every song a reflection on the lives of those of us who live here.

He started off with "Blues and Greens," a story most Cape Codders can relate to—having the blues about not having enough green. The song reflects a sense of personal inadequacy, of not quite making it, but appreciating the joy of life nonetheless.

"When Spring or Summer's Here Again" eloquently captured the seasons on this peninsula, from cabin fever winters to magnificent Julys on the beach. His music strikes a chord in a personal and local sense. "Home Sweet Home" further expresses his love of this place.

Mr. Sances played his Martin guitar with an elegant flourish and introspection, revealing a heart of melody and harmony. He modernized and personalized the guitar with the bank of electronic pedals at his feet. The pedals were affixed to what appeared to be the drawer from the dresser in some old Cape boarding house, textured with character like his sound.

He would lay down a loop of rhythm guitar with one pedal and then cover that rhythm with smooth and graceful leads refashioned by another pedal with 21st-century electronic embellishments. His guitar had a warm, rich mahogany sound similar to the color of his instrument. He succeeded in mixing modern technology to elicit his own sound out of a wooden coffeehouse standard.

"Moments of Clarity" and "Driving Home" reflected his ability to take in, appreciate,

and express the simple and reaffirming beauty of nature and those certain still moments in life. Listening to his CD "Here Today" the next morning in the car, about to turn onto Route 28, I noticed the sun coming up across the street. Because of his music I took a second look to be grateful for that moment.

What a great evening of enter-

tainment for only \$5! The next performance, on Monday, January 24, is Matt Borello's CD release party. Doors open at 7 PM and performances start at 7:30. The Cotuit Center for the Arts is at 4404 Route 28 in Cotuit. For more information, visit cotuitarts.org.

(Mr. Murphy is an attorney and resident of Falmouth.)

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