

the Good- Getting- Older

songs
& stories
tour ²⁰²⁴/₂₀₂₅



Four-Time Juno Award Winner

Bill Usher

and the space heaters

Paul Pigat * Holly Hyatt * Steve Briggs

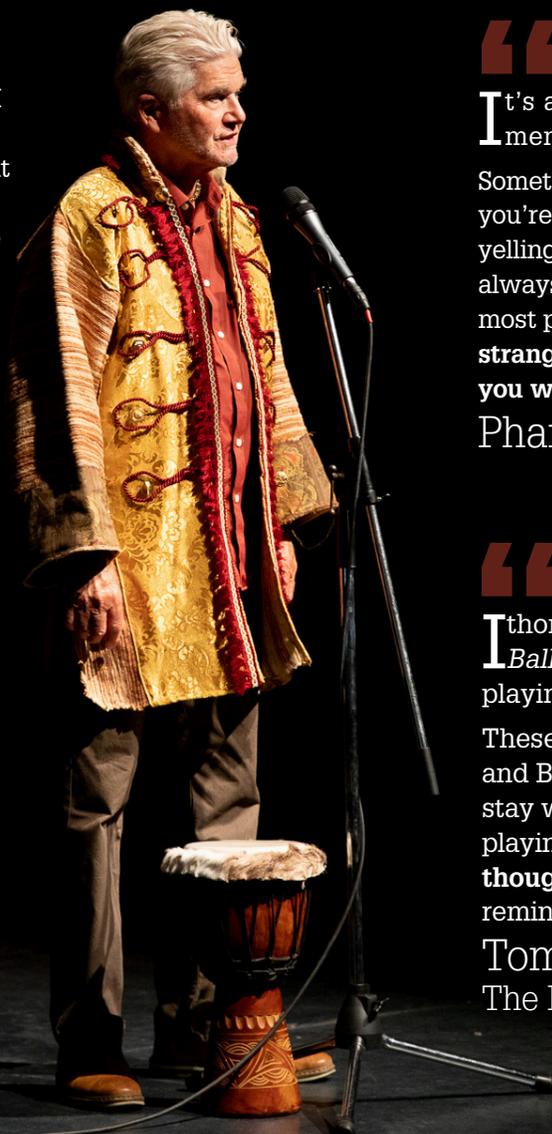
With his rare gift of communicating “good-getting-older” life experiences into memorable songs and humorous stories, Bill Usher creates an evening in the theatre that brings the generations together in a head-nodding appreciation of those universal truths that happen in families as some grow up while others grow old.

After 20 years of presenting hundreds and hundreds of other artists on stage in Golden, my personal journey back to performing started at a week-long vocal improv retreat at Hollyhock on Cortes Island last Summer 2022. I needed to see if I my “voice” would come back. It did. Yay!

With that confidence, I then spoke to **Coco Love Alcorn, Tom Landa, and Pharis Romero** — three younger generation artists I greatly admire — and told them about my dream of reaching out to BC Presenters and playing theatres again. I asked them to take a listen and let me know whether they thought my songs and performance had artistic and entertainment value for them personally, their generation, and today’s audiences. Their generous encouragement gave me the boost to keep on going.

“
All these years and I didn’t know Bill was crafting these great songs... and I didn’t know he could sing like this! Bill’s easy charisma, with these great songs, and his voice and groove, and that spark! **I want to be in that audience! I know there will be magic.**

Coco Love Alcorn



Maverick Cooperative partners Margot Holmes and Debbie Peters came on board to support my outreach efforts and an initial tour of community theatres is now booked for January 2024 with interest for bookings for the 24/25 season. With these video performances recorded in July '23 with the band (Paul Pigat – Holly Hyatt – Steve Briggs), I can show you what we have on offer. Yes, it really can be good-getting-older! Or, as a witty—but somewhat cynical—friend said to me recently, “You should call it the ‘something to live for tour!’”

I really appreciate you taking the time to take a look at what we have on offer ... thanks very much!

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It’s a head-turning-stop-and- listen kind of moment when Bill Usher opens his mouth to sing. Sometimes he gently speaks to you, and you know you’re experiencing years of singing, story-telling, yelling, whispering and loving it so hard. There’s always a pulse and groove, and he writes hooks like most people say ‘Hello.’ **Usher makes you feel strangely right at home in a house you didn’t know you wanted to live in before.** Welcome home, friend.
Pharis Romero

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Ithoroughly enjoyed *Slowdancing in the Ballroom of Life*. Great songs and great playing/singing.
These well crafted songs draw from Roots, Folk, and Blues music, and have the kind of hooks that stay with you long after the record has stopped playing. **What really draws the listener in though, is Bill’s voice and his laconic delivery,** reminiscent of Ry Cooder.
Tom Landa,
The Paperboys, Locarno

Multiple Juno award-winner Bill Usher could be one of the most accomplished but, not-so-famous people in the world of Canadian music and arts!

Starting in the 1970s, this self-taught drummer has played and recorded with several festival's worth of well-known artists, from Bruce Cockburn and Ronnie Hawkins to Valdy, Willie P. Bennett and Stan Rogers.

He's produced 60 albums, most notably the first four ground-breaking albums for Sharon, Lois & Bram, but also Stringband's *Canadian Sunset*, the Nexus Percussion Ensemble, Big Bird & Oscar the Grouch and many others receiving numerous Gold and Platinum records along the way. (And yes, that was Bill who made those Five Little Monkeys jump on the bed!)

Then there was his four-year freelancing stint with CBC Radio where he researched, produced, and hosted four dozen documentaries on such diverse artists as Taj Mahal, Ewan MacColl, and the Preservation Hall Jazz Band. He won his third Juno in the mid 1980s for *DRUMS!*, a solo stage show that he performed hundreds of times in cross-country tours. Later, he wrote and performed two musical plays – *Sonofadrum* and *Lover, Father, Husband, Son, Baby Boomer with a Drum!* – explorations of family life that were presented widely in theatres and at Fringe Festivals across Canada.



During the '90s, Bill emerged as a songwriter, releasing two albums with his band The Space Heaters. Two notable gigs involved playing Peter Gabriel's WOMAD festival in Toronto and Festival Rhyme du Monde in Montreal. By the early 2000s while working as the Ontario Arts Councils' Performing Arts



Touring Officer he created a whole album's worth of songs with the release of *Slowdancing in the Ballroom of Life*, a deep dive into the challenges and rewards of surviving into middle age – a thoughtful and groove-filled look at, mostly, the good things about getting older. From gospel-tinged hints of redemption to the sort of love songs that can only be written after you've been in love for a very long time, *Slowdancing* had a lot to say and said it very well indeed.

"These songs have already sung their way into my life," wrote Dugg Simpson, longtime artistic director of the Vancouver Folk Music Festival.

"They're about things that I have lived and about things that I am living, in a musical language that I can understand."

Pursuing a long held dream to leave the city behind, Bill and his wife moved west in 2002 and settled in Golden, BC. "Pete Seeger's elder advice to me backstage at the Mariposa Folk Festival in the '70s, was my 'north star' growing older," says Usher. "Pete told me, 'You don't find community. You make community.' So simple, yet so powerful."



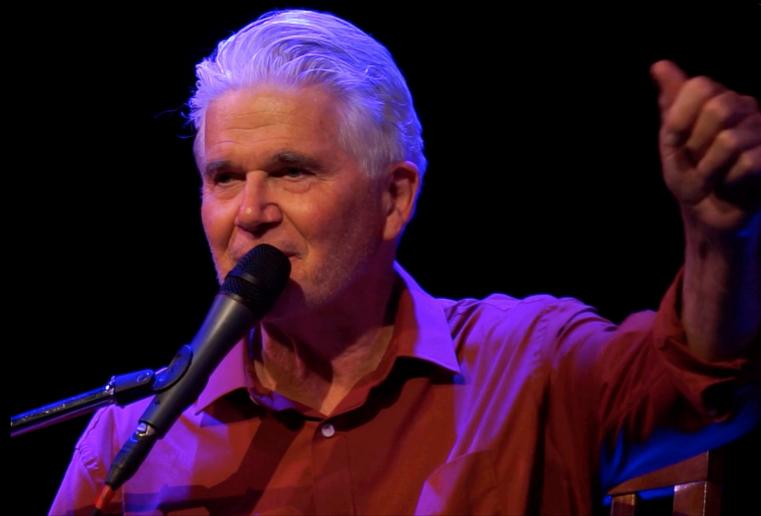
★ Sharon, Lois & Bram Singing 'n Swinging with Bill Usher & the Mammoth Band ★



So Bill started volunteering for the small Golden arts council and was soon appointed the artistic and executive director leading Kicking Horse Culture's phenomenal growth these past 19 years. Playing a strategic leadership role in the \$3.3 million restoration of the dilapidated Civic Centre into the town's performing arts theatre, Bill was honoured with Golden's Community Development Award in 2012. Mayor Christina Benty said, "Bill has proven time and again an ability to hold and sustain vision while working shoulder to shoulder with those on the ground. Over the breadth of his career, this has translated into a litany of impactful work in numerous cultural industries and truly sets him above and apart."

It goes without saying, the pandemic shut down was a revelatory time for artists. "As a presenter of hundreds of concerts, I spoke to so many artists during COVID who despaired — questioning themselves, their identity, and their future. That struck a major chord with me," Usher says. "I'd been away from performing regularly for many years but that wonderful feeling that comes from delighting an audience still simmers and I asked myself, if now's not the time to go back out on the road, then when?"

Usher has developed a rare gift of communicating "good-getting-older" life experiences into lyrics that are relatable and universal. He brings an elder's perspective that is not common in today's indie folk/pop music by crafting lyrics that are direct in expressing



matters of the heart sung upon melodies that are simply beautiful. Dugg Simpson adds, "These are the kinds of love songs that a kid can't write...and surely shouldn't sing. Finally somebody singing songs about life that resembles the one I'm living through these days."

The last word goes to Bill, "Hey don't forget to tell folks about the groove," Usher laughs. "I've been drumming for over 50 years now, so you know there's going to be a groove!"

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How did a four-time Juno winner, a first-rate professional conga player, a major TV series writer and producer, a veteran recording artist, a sideman who toured with Bruce Cockburn and producer of Sharon, Lois & Bram — how in short did Bill Usher manage to infiltrate the Atlantic Fringe Festival without flights of angelic trumpets or at least a 50-piece brass band to announce his coming? Expertly paced and delivered this is a funny and touching piece of work enlightened with original song and super-charged drumming, in which Usher recalls significant events of his own journey toward the light of love and understanding. This show is a big time Fringe hit!

Stephen Pedersen, *Halifax Chronicle Herald*

““

Whitehorse rocked, beat to the rhythm, laughed and danced for a week to Usher's heartfelt honesty and warmth.

Michele Emslie, Yukon International Storytelling Festival

““

These are songs that provide a make-you-move earful with words that make you 'moved' too, touching tender places you thought were yours alone. Give yourself a treat. Listen to the stories Bill Usher has to sing. They are our own simple truths sung in the air for us all to feel.

Linda Page, Adlerian Psychology World Conference

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We were lucky enough to share a concert stage with Bill. What a fantastic performer! He has somehow found that magical combination of fresh vitality and seasoned wisdom in his show. His songs are personal yet universal, moving the entire audience to laugh, sigh and sing along. We highly recommend Bill's performance to all presenters in BC.

Chris Frye, The Bills



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