

## Musician Webb takes on the world in Toronto's NXNE fest



**By Brock Weir**

As a guitar-playing student at Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School, recruiting students to come to gigs gave Ryan Webb an early taste of one of the fundamentals of the music industry ? marketing!

Taking the guitar class offered by the venerable high school, which celebrated its 125th anniversary over the weekend, the instrument connected him with people who shared the same passion for music, trading music, and building a firm base of both friends and skills.

?We would share songs, and while I wasn't actually in the school band, we would always promote [our own] around the school and get a lot of students to come out to our shows,? he recalls. ?There was a lot of good marketing in those years.?

His parents were also a formative influence that when he found his niche they encouraged him to go out and learn everything about it ? from song writing to production, eventually heading off to Seneca College to study the same. By then, he was already well connected within the Aurora music scene, a regular face at The Arts, and well underway to becoming a triple and quadruple threat.

It was there he met singer and guitarist Josef Thomas and, along with Mr. Webb's cousin, Taylor MacLean, they teamed up to form the indie band Hungry Lake. Hungry Lake is currently recording an album in Toronto. With Mr. Webb doubling as the sound engineer, they have brought on some help from John Switzer to play some bass on the tracks.

Mr. Switzer, a Juno-nominated producer was an influential professor for them at Seneca College, along with Alfio Annibalini, who has come on board as their sound mixer, fresh off of working with Nelly Furtado, Big Sugar, and Kardinal Offishall.

Hungry Lake itself takes its name from the name of an Ottawa-area lake from which Josef writes a lot of the songs. The name was already coined by him for a solo project and when the trio teamed up, it naturally flowed over to the expanded group.

They recently took their chances, put their marketing skills to good use, and applied online for a gig at Toronto's North by North East (NXNE) Festival, which brings together music, film and comedy at various venues around the city between June 10 and June 16.

Attracting numerous bands from across Canada, the United States, South America, Europe, Asia and Australia, the fest is the Canadian counterpart to the hugely popular SXSW festival in the United States.

“The core of the group is the three of us, but when we perform live we often get friends to play along with us to fill in the gaps on the instruments we don't have, such as bass and lead guitar,” says Mr. Webb. “As far as the genre goes, the base is a kind of folk, but we put a rock and roll spin on top of that ? kind of like alternative space rock.”

While they aim to entertain, their lyrics also take a page out of Bob Dylan's playbook, marrying the words with words that can also represent a certain degree of social conscience. According to Mr. Webb, that is Josef's department and they often reflect his views on society, liberally sprinkled with commentary on Toronto-based politics.

“Our lyrics are at the core and that is what I find most important,” Mr. Webb explains. “Joe is more of a throwback to the kind of folk where it is more storytelling rather than throwing out random love songs. I usually hope people listen more to the lyrics, get a good vibe from the lyrics and maybe even learn. We have a couple of songs that are Bob Dylan-esque, but we also have love songs and feel-good songs.”

In the grand scheme of things, Mr. Webb hopes he has a long career ahead of him in the music recording industry, but he is already planning ahead in the event this doesn't work.

“Recording is something I would like to do,” he said. “I know it is fairly unrealistic in this day in age, so I am starting to look at going back to school for horticulture. I have always loved gardening and growing plants, and the calmness that comes with it.” But, given the fact, they have a pretty significant gig just around the corner, and an album getting ready to drop, it seems unlikely that retreating to a zen garden is in the cards any time soon.

Hungry Lake debuts at the NXNE Festival with a performance on Friday, June 14 at 9 p.m. at The Sister (1554 Queen Street West). They will be joined by Pat Antonik and Alex Grantham on guitar, and David Kierstead on bass.