

Ich bin ein Berliner - Then and Now

The phrase above has tended to have different meanings in different historical contexts.

In 1899, in Montreal, it might have referred to a then 48 year old Emile Berliner or his brother Joseph who had been responsible for setting up Telefabrik Berliner and Deutsche Grammophon A.G. in Hanover.

Emile, who already held patents for a new, improved microphone and the gramophone, was ready to exploit his patents in North America, and so chose The Paris of North America and the headlands of “the New World” as home to his new enterprise, and it turns out that the decision was a fateful one. Montreal became an important place in the history of recording and continues to stand at the avante garde of the industry. Berliner’s influence on the local culture should not be underemphasized either. Local performers and entertainers were among the first people to exploit the new technology, a tendency which, not surprisingly, continues to this day.

Ron Bankley’s introduction to Montreal came with the Ville Emard Blues Band’s arrival in the early part of the seventies. This decade began with troops marching in the street, an “Oil Crisis” which echoed across the entire North American continent, and a political Battle Royale that would rage for a decade before a “truce” was declared. The Ville Emard Blues Band rose out of these turbulent times and it surprised no one that the band’s music spoke of revolution. Montreal was isolated from the North American mainstream by language and culture, so the rest of the continent didn’t hear the news of the revolution until mid-decade. In the meantime, this rock band with nineteen players had managed to destroy every marketing and public relations rule that existed, and had become wildly successful while doing it.

Ron’s musical virtuosity and his skill as a wordsmith were fundamental to understanding the band’s impact. ‘VEBB’ had abandoned the tried and true commercial approach to recording and had opted, instead, for a “real music for the real world” model which permanently redefined Quebec’s musical history.

In the decades since that auspicious beginning, Ron has worked in musical aggregations that lived at the cutting edge of musical expression, among them Koma and Contraction. He has also accompanied the legends of Quebecois culture and he continues to perform and record his own songs for the new fans who are just becoming aware of his extraordinary body of work.

Insurgent Sun, Ron’s latest CD continues the tradition by assembling the finest players that Quebec has to offer, and once again getting “up close and personal” with today’s reality. Those who have had the good fortune to hear the work will doubtless agree that in the struggle between Ron and the “new reality”, reality loses.

In the end, we're all sons and daughters of Berliner, and the same town that produced Maynard Ferguson, Oscar Peterson, Paul Bley, Burt Bacharach, Galt McDermott, Gino Vanelli, Celine Dion, Leonard Cohen and Ville Emarad Blues Band, among others, will continue to be at the center of The New Renaissance that probably began with the phrase "Ich bin ein Berliner"