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Brandon boy bashes beyond B-town's boundaries, becomes big time baterista

Frank McGwire



HAPPENINGS ON THE SCENE

Frank McGwire is a radio personality and booster of the music scene in Brandon and Westman.
» frank@kx96.astral.com

Since deciding to turn his love of drumming into his full-time profession, he's played hundreds of shows across North America. His office is behind the drum kit.

His day job is mostly enjoyable at night, on stage, laying down the groove and keeping time to help make the show happen.

For close to 25 years, he's toured or recorded with several well known Canadian artists.

Now after all this time behind the kit, Brandon's Chris (Suds) Sutherland is ready to do something he's never attempted in his career — he's recording his first solo CD.

In this exclusive interview, we discuss some of the highlights in his career as a professional musician.

Frank: Some days it feels like just yesterday when I was a teenager jamming away on my favourite rock tunes in my folks' basement. I can remember when you took the next step, though, and went to M.I.T. How many years ago was that now?

Chris: 1988. Yikes right?

Who are some of the more notable bands you've worked with, either through recording or even tours of duty, in your close to 25 years as a professional musician?

I've been the drummer in the Kim Mitchell Band since 1999. The only album he's made in that period was when I was recording and touring with Doc Walker so I have yet to record with Kim. But I am the longest serving drummer in his band by almost three times the next guy. As I said, I recorded in Nashville and toured with Doc Walker on the self-titled album that was a breakthrough. I've also toured with and recorded with prog-rock legends Saga. These days, I'm also playing with Jarvis Church of the Philosopher Kings and occasionally with Luke McMaster, also another Brandonite. As well I've been doing some recording with Lawrence Gowan lately.



Chris 'Suds' Sutherland plays at the Metal Works International Drum Show last year. (Courtesy Dale Benvenuto)

Minister of Plow



At left, 'Suds' in his CP Express days at Crocus Plains high school, circa 1984, holding the tools of his trade. Middle, at work in his office, captured from backstage at an outdoor show with the Kim Mitchell Band in downtown Kingston, circa 2007. At right, a photo shoot prior to a recent drum clinic in Toronto. (Submitted)

What do you feel was your best recording experience?

The Doc Walker album in Nashville and a few others, but I do a lot of sessions. Every one is a new challenge and I really thrive in that environment. The stuff I have been doing with Gowan is really cool but I can't really say much more about that yet.

I remember your stint with Doc Walker. This came after so many years of working with numerous rock outfits. How was the transition to playing country after laying down all those rock grooves?

Truthfully, not much different. Country now is loud and grooving and Doc is really a live rock band with country roots. It was a natural

transition. I sort of lead a double life and have played with a lot of country artists since.

Who are you working with now?

A few Jarvis Church gigs but mostly just gearing up for a big summer with Kim Mitchell. There will be some Manitoba gigs for sure. Then various sessions and freelance work. But really focusing on this album of my own.

Where are you based out of these days?

Toronto. I've lived in Toronto long enough on and off, mostly on, since the mid-'90s so that it really feels like home to me now.

You've been doing more and

more drum clinics over the past few years. How long have you been doing those and what is the most popular question you get asked from aspiring drummers at your clinics?

I started getting into clinics about six years ago. Actually my first real clinic was at Ted Good Music in Brandon. It was really cool to come back and do a hometown clinic for my first one. Most of the questions I get focus around how I work in so many different styles and how to network. It's what my clinic is really based on.

Every drummer or player picks up some cool industry slang over the years. One of my favourites has always been "gig juice" (when you're

hopped up on adrenalin before, during and after a gig) — also known as "gig sweat". The new term you've used in some recent interviews is "plow sauce". What are the origins of this term?

I'm not really sure when it started but it's been a long running term in the Kim Mitchell Band. We all say it. Even the fans say it now. If something is really rocking, it "plows" or we call the gig "The Plow". It's really about just going out and making such an impact that it "plows" everyone down. So if you have the intention to rock, you're going to put some "plow sauce" on it.

What is your favourite thing about being a drummer?

Just be making my way through life doing something I enjoy, which takes me around the world, and lets me meet incredible people, fans, friends, and other musicians. It's become more about the experience than the actual drumming.

Who are some of your favourite drummers of all time?

Jeff Porcaro of Toto is always No. 1. He was such an important session player, too. Then probably Tommy Aldridge, Carlos Vega, Matt Chamberlain, and a hundred other session greats. I'm influenced by someone new every day.

How many hours per week do you play?

It varies greatly. I don't actually practise much these days. Just to learn new songs for shows. The amount I play is dictated by the number of shows and sessions. I play a lot, though. That being said, rather than practising, I'm putting in serious hours writing and recording my own music and producing other projects. So it's non-stop work.

I'm told you're handling the lead vocal duties on your debut album. How long have you been a singing drummer?

I've always been a backup singer. It makes you more valuable. I am a reluctant lead singer, though, but I'm pretty comfortable in the straight up rock zone.

You're about to record your first CD. Tell us about how you arrived at the decision to finally record your own after all these years of playing on so many others?

Well, I was in a bit of a writing groove. I realized when I looked at the folder on my computer that I had all these two guitar rock songs. "Plow" songs that fit together. Most were from writing for other projects and the songs didn't make it on the albums. These leftovers weren't bad songs, they just didn't fit the style of the project at the time. There was enough for a whole album and they had never been recorded properly. It just sort of hit me. So I asked a few friends if they thought it was a good idea and they all kind of said, "It's about time!"

Do you have a working title for the disc yet? Knowing you, there's probably a list of possible titles.

Indeed. I wrote a song a few years back called "Headphones" with my friend Paul Yee. So the old rat pack thing popped into my head and I came up with "Ain't That A Kick In The Headphones" because it'll be all high-energy stuff for the most part.

See 'Big guitar plow' — Page 4

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It's all big guitar 'plow' on CD

« Cont'd from Page 1

Did you write all the songs?

Most of the tunes, yes. There are two co-writes at this point but mostly they are all my tunes. I am considering adding a cover tune but not sure about that yet. We'll see what ends up on the record.

Who is all recording with you?

Myself on drums and lead vocals; I'll also play a bit of keys and bass, but nothing fancy. Gary Borden from Sass Jordan's band will play a bunch of the guitar. We go way back — he's amazing and versatile. Another longtime friend, Russ MacKay, will be engineering and co-producing. He's worked with Tragically Hip, Gowan, Styx, and Kim Mitchell. That will be the core. Then there will be some amazing guests: Dave Meros from prog rock gods Spock's Beard will play some bass, Luis Espaillat from Eve To Adam will also play some bass, and Darren Savard from Dallas Green's band has already tracked some guitar.

That's a pretty solid special guest list! Any other guest spots in the works? Let's face it, Chris, you've worked with lots of people over the past 25 years.

There will be more — and a couple of big names, but I don't want to spill the beans until the tape has rolled. I'm basically begging all my favourite musicians to help out. It's

going to be quite the list when we're done. It grows every day.

What musical genres are you covering on the album?

It's all "plow" — big guitar rock songs. Definitely a Cheap Trick-Foo Fighters-Jack White mix up going on in there, if that gives you any screwy idea. There will be cool rocking drumming, but it will not be a muso shredder drum solo album. I'm not really a fan of drum solos. I'm a fan of songs. So trying to write great songs is the key.

Is there a statement you're making or a theme with these songs?

Nothing more than establishing myself as more than a drummer and getting these songs out in the world. It's always been more about music than just drums. And as I said, the theme would be "Plow"!

Where are you recording the tracks?

Mostly at Russ MacKay's killer studio, Blue Sound and Music in the Beaches in Toronto. Amazing place with amazing vibe in an incredible neighbourhood. Some of the guests will be tracking long distance by emailing files. I love technology these days. We can get guys from California and Nashville to play tracks over night.

Do you have a release date planned or subsequent touring in support of the disc?

The release date is loose but I do plan on having it done by the end of May for sure to coincide with a drum clinic tour I'm booking. The album is self-funded and crowd-funded. There is a new trend of taking the power back from record labels and doing the release yourself. Funding the album by launching a pre sale and contribution page on places like Kapipal and Kickstarter. Mine is on Kapipal and has incredible reward and incentive packages. The more you donate to the making of the album, the more cool stuff you can get in on. It really does cost a fortune to make a record. Players, studio time, manufacturing — we're not all millionaire musicians. We're just trying to keep the ship off the rocks and create something cool. The help of friends and fans is really needed and appreciated.

Please check it out at: www.kapipal.com/chrissutherland

Any parting words for aspiring musicians?

More than ever, strike out on your own. The Internet has changed the game. With YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Kickstarter and more, anybody can make it work. Look up people like Amanda Palmer and Bob Lefsetz and learn everything you can from them. You just need to focus on what YOU do, not what everyone else is doing. Be true, original, and work hard. Somebody will love what you do. Thanks for your help and support, Frank. Love to the hometown!

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- \$60 or more Package One + Karaoke! You get a digital version of the album MINUS the instrument you want to jam along with. No Lead Vocal, No Drums, No Guitar. It's your choice. + your name in the credits listed as Karaoke Superstar!
- \$100 or more Package One + drumstick and drumhead used on the recording signed by all the players + Thank you by name in the cd credits
- \$110 or more Package One + Guest list and meet and greet for 2 at a future Concert or Clinic (Pending availability with artist and venue) + Name in the cd credits.
- \$125 or more Package One + You appear in the video for the single "Headphones" (I have a plan on how this is possible no matter where you live) + Name in the album credits
- \$150 or more Package One + 1 hour Drum lesson in person (in GTA area or pending availability on tour) or on skype+ Name in the cd credits.
- \$160 or more Package One + FLY ON THE WALL. You plus a friend come by the studio for an exclusive one hour hang to watch the recording of the cd. I'll buy the Starbucks! (travel and accommodations are responsibility of buyer)
- \$200 or more Package One + SHAKE YOUR THANG!! You get to come by the studio for one hour and play Tambourine on the single "Headphones" + get credit on the CD + and have a clip appear in the video for "Headphones" + you keep the Gon Bops Tambourine!! Plus I'll buy the Pizza or Starbucks. (travel and accommodations are responsibility of buyer)
- \$250 or more Package One + MORE COWBELL!! You get to come by the studio for one hour and play cowbell on the single "Headphones" and recreate the famous "Workin' For The Weekend" Loverboy cowbell intro! + get credit on the CD + and have a clip appear in the video for "Headphones" + you keep the Gon Bops RED cowbell!! Plus I'll buy the Pizza or Starbucks. (travel and accommodations are responsibility of buyer)
- \$400 or more Package One + you get the Kim Mitchell Band front bass drum logo drumhead off my 2012 tour kit. Signed by the band! Presented in person at a KMB show. + 2 tickets to the show (travel to show and accoms not provided)
- \$500 or more Package One + an Autographed Sabian 18" or 19" Crash Cymbal used on the recording! Presented in Person (In the GTA or at a touring gig only) + 2 tickets to a gig or clinic with Chris, or come by the studio to pick it up. (Pending artist and venue approval)
- \$600 or more Package One + an Autographed Sonor Ascent Snare Drum used on the recording! Presented in Person (In the GTA or at a touring gig only) + 2 tickets to a concert or clinic with Chris, or come by the studio to pick it up. (Pending artist and venue approval)
- \$4,000 or more Package One + You get my Sonor Delite Drumkit used on the album and in the making of video. 12" Tom, 13" Tom, 16" Floor Tom, 18" Floor Tom, 24" Bass Drum. With Sonor Ascent Snare, Tom Mount Hardware, Floor Tom Legs, and Snare Stand. (GTA pick up or Buyer Pays Shipping)