

THE PIANO MAN

Keys to a musician's life.

Words by Leo Graziani

Tyler Yarema, musician, is a big guy who's limping a bit as he walks into the *Spirit of the City* office, his leg in a brace nursing a squash injury. When he speaks, his voice fills the room—I can only imagine what he must sound like in concert.

Yarema is a self-taught multi-instrumentalist. He plays guitar, bass, trumpet and harmonica, but the piano is home. He fell in love with the instrument at 16, and believes that learning more than one instrument is key to being a great musician. For example, "If you know how to play drums as a piano player, you have a better understanding of how to bash out a rhythm," he says. "When you hear piano players in piano bars or guys that only play solo piano, if you really pay attention, they're always dropping beats."

Yarema considers himself a blues guy who happens to play jazz. His style is boogie-woogie with a strong New Orleans influence. "I'm a big fan of Professor Longhair—the father of New Orleans piano—and Huey 'Piano' Smith," he says. He also counts Oscar Peterson, Dave Brubeck, Fats Waller and especially Duke Ellington as major influences.

Why this style, I ask. What is it about it that speaks to him? "There's an honesty to it," he reflects. "A purity. I don't know if I can really describe it; I don't philosophize about it, I just play because I love it. But the realm of blues and jazz allows you to be very open and expressive; it's never limiting. I improvise all the time." A pause. "That would probably be it: it's the freedom, the improvisation."

Yarema takes inspiration from the music community in Port Credit. He's impressed by the sheer amount of raw talent in the area, and was an early supporter of the Southside Shuffle. "I started working with the Southside Shuffle guys very early on, and I still work with them now," he says. "Chuck Jackson is an awesome dude. I'm always amazed at how he runs a show; how he holds a room."

He'll be playing Happy Hour at Shore every day during the Shuffle, with a headlining spot on September 5. "That's Pianorama," he explains. "It's me, Curley Bridges and Julian Fauth, with Buckey Burger on the drums. Each [pianist] plays a 15-minute jam and then we all play together at the end."

I ask him if there are any surprises coming. "We'll see what happens," he says slyly. "I will say this, though. You get three guys all playing similar things, and they'll all be trying to one-up each other. The Shuffle is always a lot of fun. Here's hoping for good weather!"

Catch Pianorama at the Southside Shuffle on September 5 at 11:00 p.m. on the Dawg FM/Mississippi stage. And check out Tyler Yarema's music on his site, tyleryarema.com.