

Bruce Ley - so much life

'It's been about 10 years that I've been playing for Leisa [Way]. I worked with her at other times on other productions,' said Bruce Ley in a telephone conversation with the Citizen, 'When she became a producer, I became her arranger. I think it happened fairly organically.'

Bruce Ley is the arranger, piano and guitar player, vocals for the many shows that Leisa Way has written and is writing. He has been with her from her first production. She has written and produced ten in all so far.

Currently, Leisa Way is starring in her production of Across the Pond, the British Invasion, which is on, finishing up this weekend on Sunday, February 3, at Theatre Orangeville.

Mr. Ley went on, 'In 2017, we went out west (on tour with the Oh, Canada show to celebrate the 150th Anniversary) all the way to Vancouver Island for a week. We spent a week in Saskatchewan and I loved it. I had completely the wrong impression. I love the young men between 30 and 50. They were so sure about themselves. They didn't seem to be concerned about competition with each other they were smart, sure of themselves, non competitive.

'We've been out East a couple times with Leisa. We're going to out west this year again. We do play most of the shows at various times. It's a little bit of a challenge, not for me so much. The three fellows at the front [Fred Smith, Bobby Prochaska, and Nathan Smith, with drummer, Don Reid] all have the lines to sing and they have to get that right.

'I have my own responsibilities I try to keep everybody happy. Since I don't have the same kind of thing with the audience that they have I'm able to listen a little more and be critical. Sometimes, I just might mention something sometimes I make notes in between songs. So, I mention some things. They can get a little loose and there could be an easy solution.

'Leisa works very hard. She's in tremendous shape. Three of the guys are really interested in staying fit. There are trips to the gym; they take care of themselves really well and they act properly, they play well- and they rehearse! It's really nice.'

We have all heard the horrors stories of eating on the road but Mr. Ley reassured us about this gang: 'For two or three years, I was trying to do my own cooking. If we're in a place for two to three weeks at a time, we have access to a kitchen. If we're on tour, it's not easy. We try to find restaurants a bit healthy and not too expensive. Just like anybody else when you're on the road, there's a per diem.

'You do a lot of performing,' he began by saying, 'that's why musicians are treated the way they are. For the amount of time that goes into training, it's way more time than a lawyer but we're don't make more than mechanics. We do like what we're doing, though.

We asked for some personal history.

'When I was younger, in Toronto,' he complied, 'I was quite young, 16 or 17, I had done some recording. I was called to New York City with a man. My own band was recording. After age 19, I was on the road playing in the bars for five years. without a break. I was playing the Hammond organ. This was my own band.'

Then, 'somebody called me to do a recording in Toronto and somebody else heard me and liked what they heard. As a result, I was three or four years, working for the same studio and I learned everything about recording. I was playing a lot of piano and called to work in other studios. I don't know if I was the top player but I was top enough that I worked every day.'

Soon enough, 'people realized that I could write music as well. THP Orchestra was part of TPH Productions. We did an album a month for 5 years. I wrote music and another guy wrote the lyrics.

?I never saw a studio then; I mostly wrote. I had definite ideas how things should be done but I wasn't the producer. We had some albums that did very well.?

From being behind the scenes to a face on television, Mr. Ley started playing for both the Tommy Hunter and Ronny Prophet shows.

?It was interesting: up to then, I was thought of as a rock and roll piano player but, then, everyone thought I was a country piano player. I played on the Ronny Prophet show for seven years and Tommy Hunter for four, at the same time. I was the only guy that played on both shows at the same time.

?The other thing in Toronto was writing music for television shows and some movies. What really did take time was the TV shows. For four to five years, I was really working 18 hours a day and just never stopped. What happens is you keep learning. One of the joys was it might be set in 1842 or a documentary about New Guinea. So, I'd do some research and learn to write music about the era or the place.?

After some time though, ?I was getting tired of it. When I left Toronto, it never crossed my mind that I was leaving my career. I have since learned how to re-invent myself.?

There have been revelations.

?What I really like, I found out in the last five to ten years: I'm a guy that is able to help other people find their dreams. Doing recordings with some young people and I see their eyes light up. It's really cool. When I'm actually working with a young person ? we both get excited about the same thing at the same time ? because I have this huge wealth of recording experience. It doesn't happen often. Maybe three per year.

?Not always the young ones; sometimes an older person who has been wanting to record ? that's wonderful too.?

Finally, but certainly not least, Mr. Ley mentioned his playing for the two-point charge rural churches, of which his wife, Candice Bist, is the minister.

?I love being able to play solo piano and being able to play very quietly. I also enjoy working with the choir. This is a relatively new thing for me.

?I've been writing choral arrangements, something I've never done before,? he told us. ?It's big fun.?

As for how Mr. Ley sees the future of Ms Ways' productions, he says, ?We'll just continue doing what we're doing. We play in rural settings most of the time and that's great for me. I just really like music, that's all.?

Across the Pond, the British Invasion is playing at Theatre Orangeville until Sunday, March 3. For tickets, as usual, go to the Box Office at 87 Broadway or the Information Centre on Buena Vista and Hwy 10; by telephone on 519-942-3423 or online at [HYPERLINK ?http://www.theatreorangeville.ca/?www.theatreorangeville.ca](http://www.theatreorangeville.ca/?www.theatreorangeville.ca)