

Carmanah Band coming to Orangeville pub next Thursday

By Constance Scrafield

Laura Mina Mitic had a dream, similar to lots of 15-year-old girls, of playing a guitar and singing songs others had written, as well as songs she wrote herself.

She joined amateur bands and discovered that she preferred singing with others to singing by herself. So she dreamed of finding the right musicians, "along the path" with whom to play, a band with whom to work and build a collective career.

Living a couple of years ago in Victoria, B.C., where there is a strong music scene, Mitic met Pat Ferguson at a festival.

"We played together spontaneously," she related the beginnings of their musical friendship, "and found we really matched. So, we stayed to play together."

They did gigs at venues, inviting other musicians to join them over the next two years. They met, at different times, Mike Baker and Marek Olsen, and ultimately formed the Carmanah Band, which will visit Orangeville next week as part of an Ontario tour.

"We met and played with other musicians," she observed. "Over the last couple of years, we got together with Marek and then Mike, and now we're very excited about performing together."

The name Carmanah comes from the mighty, uncut rainforest in B.C.'s Carmanah Walbran Provincial Park. It is one of the few remaining ancient forests still protected from logging which, heartbreakingly, is permitted elsewhere on Vancouver Island.

Rich and valuable beyond words, the forest is inhabited with many species of wildlife, birds, bats and insects. When an ancient tree dies naturally and falls, it provides intense regeneration where it lays, for the earth and its inhabitants.

It is in honour of this wonderful forest, the band took its name, calling themselves Carmanah. With this noble connection to nature, they are making a reputation of good music and a very caring approach to their own environmental footprint, in British Columbia and, increasingly, the rest of the country.

Their style of music is "eclectic," taken from a wide range of music.

"Folk, multiple influences - West Coast Soul, Rock," Mitic said. "I play the guitar and violin. I do the vocals, but with the band, we sing four-part harmony."

Their upcoming tour in Ontario celebrates the release of their new album, *Speak in Rhythms*, which came out in February. During this tour of Toronto, London, Collingwood and Kingsville, they will perform at Orangeville's Mill Street Pub next Thursday (March 22).

"Then, we fly back to Vancouver in time for the Juno Festival on March 24," she said. "The Juno's are held in a different city every year and this time, it's Vancouver."

Most of the songs they sing are written by Mitic, on her own and in collaboration with Ferguson. The others contribute to the arrangement of the music, creating such songs as *Boxcar*, *Never Goin' Back*, and *Voices Over Water*.

Ferguson, who specializes in vocals and guitar, is a self-taught musician, playing in festivals since he was 16.

"What makes his music is his love of playing," Mitic said. "He doesn't read music; he just plays everything by ear - wonderfully."

Of the four, Baker (vocals and keyboard) has the most formal training. He studied keyboard in university, both classical and jazz performance and theory.

"He also did computer sciences," Mitic commented. "Of us all, he has the most music training."

Olsen, who does vocals and plays bass, came into the band having played the piano in his early years, but was "really drawn to the bass - he loves the rhythm," she said.

Nick Laba is the glue - the man on the drums.

Having said all that, Ferguson is also an industrial electrician and has considerable mechanical experience - which he put to use in converting his 1997 Dodge Ram diesel to run on waste vegetable oil, also known as straight vegetable oil (SVO).

Using a two-tank system, one each of diesel fuel and SVO, to which mechanics are connected with the engine, he controls which fuel is pumped as they drive along. It took him the better part of a month to research, buy parts and assemble this arrangement as needed.

The truck has to be started with diesel fuel, but once it's well warmed up, it can be switched to the SVO, which they get from restaurants as they go along. At the end of the drive, the SVO must be purged from the engine to start the next drive with the diesel.

"This is a lifestyle," Ferguson said. "It's not a walk in the park, but it has saved us nearly \$10,000 in the last three years, driving nearly 100,000 kilometres, fully loaded with band equipment and six band members (including his dog, Spud)."

For his next project, he is working on a 1972 GM PD4905A Greyhound bus, once again powered with vegetable oil, while also engineering heating, solar and looking for sponsors, to be off grid travelling musicians "with comfort."

As well, in keeping with their concern for the environment, Carmanah is a dedicated member of the Jelly Fish Project. It was originally created by a band that saw a way to capture the attention of students in school presentations to the peril in which the oceans currently exist. Using rock music to open their presentations, the band members go on to talk about the oceans' problems and what can and must be done about them.

?We talked about our ambitions for the band: to keep our eyes on the road ahead,? Mitic reflected about their future. ?Travelling, we meet amazing people. We add to the vegetable oil thinking ? we're very conscious of when we are eating on the road. We never use plastic forks and anything we might throw away.?

All this and a great concert is coming to Orangeville.

Doors open at 6:30 p.m. for the 7 p.m .show. Tickets at \$25 will be available at the pub.