

Fred Eaglesmith and Tif Ginn coming to Orangeville

By Constance Scrafield

"We're always on tour. We've just come from touring all over Ontario, just coming home and now, we're getting ready to go to Europe."

So said Fred Eaglesmith in a recent telephone interview.

Before that trip, though, he and his wife Tiffani Ginn will be performing in Orangeville at the Opera House. This will be this Saturday (April 15), and it promises to be a super evening.

By Europe, Eaglesmith meant specifically the Netherlands and Belgium, where he tours frequently.

"I love it there and I have a really big following there," he said. "It's like touring Ontario, I play every little town in the Netherlands."

Born in Guelph, Eaglesmith's family lived most of his life on a farm south of Hamilton. For him, life's path was clear early on.

"By the time I was 12, I was playing my guitar and writing songs," he said. "I was going to Hamilton to the record stores to buy records and listen to how they sang."

It was the family's religion in rural Ontario during the late 1950s and '60s that would have squashed young Eaglesmith's enthusiasm if it had been possible, but it was not. He attended private religious schools.

"They were very religious. I was not encouraged, so I never got any training in music," he reflected. "If it'd been church music, they would have taught me, but not for pop music."

"Once I decided to be a musician, I failed every grade in high school," he added. "I just went to the music stores all afternoon."

In spite of having played and toured all these years, two Juno awards and a long time of a professional career as a musician, Eaglesmith said humorously, "I'm nearly 60 years old and I'm sitting practising my scales. Now I'm learning to play better technically. It's very exciting!"

We talked a bit about the Hamilton of his youth as more or less his home town and how it has changed: "now the champion of the man bun"

"You couldn't go north of Main Street after 6 p.m. you'd get beat up," he added, somewhat wryly "It was a great town."

He returned to the stories of his youth.

"I got off the bus after the last day of school at 15 years old and I hitched out west," he recalled. "At Sudbury there was a train with box cars and I just got on. They don't have that anymore. You couldn't hitch like that now."

As he crossed the country, "I could play at the restaurants all night and I learned to cook, make breakfast in the morning and then, just sleep."

Strangers took care of him.

"In those days, the men looked after us. I was 15," he recalled. "I learned a lot. At that time, I was not very good (at playing the guitar) because I had no training."

It was not his last hitch-hiking journey out west, but when he was 23, he went for the last time that way and commented about that trip: "I was one of the last ones to hitch hike from Ontario to go out west. You couldn't do it now."

He began to understand people, too.

"Most people don't like us to hide our quirks," was his impression. "So, I took advantage when I learned that people like my quirks."

As time goes on, tastes change and now Eaglesmith finds himself back to listening to Dean Martin: "the happiness in that musicality."

Tif Ginn and he married two and a half years ago. They met through the music business where she was singing with her sister.

"We've been touring together for almost 10 years."

Ginn "was trained to play" she's from Texas. He added his praise and respect for his wife, "In the studio, everything she touches turns to gold."

Of their upcoming show in Orangeville, he said, "It's Tif and I. It's a new show. It's a happy show. People really like this show better than anything I've ever done."

Eaglesmith and Ginn will be on at the Opera House, 87 Broadway April 15.

Showtime is 7 p.m. For tickets, call 519-583-3878, or go online at www.fredeaglesmith.com, visit the tourist information office at Buena Vista Drive and Highway 10; or call 519-942-3423; or visit www.theatreorangeville.ca