

LOCAL JAZZ MUSICIAN APPEARS ON TVO

By Conan de Vries

It's open to argument whether an artist is drawn first to a medium of expression or is rather influenced first by the expression itself and hence to the medium by which that expression might best be communicated.

Gregg Brennan can't recall exactly what attracted him to the drums. "I'm not sure what possessed me to take up the drums" says Brennan..."The kids I teach pick it up because they think it will be fun so I assume I must have felt the same way".

He picked the instrument first and later decided what to say with it.

It cannot be mere coincidence that the medium turned out so fitting to the musician. The elemental sounds of the drum have proven ideally suited to Brennan's growing interest in experimenting with fundamental musical forms, the building blocks of a tune, the architecture of a song. "We're balancing composition and melody with improvisation" he says "we're taking away the rules".

Books, film art and all forms of music provide the drummer a jumping-off-point, an impetus for innovation. "I'm looking for people with their own voices" says Brennan, "that's what I look for in any art".

On the drums, Brennan can build his music from the bottom up, from the drums to the trumpet. When Brennan isn't leading his band *Gregg Brennan Aiséiri*, he can often be found painting, finding in the pigments the same elemental building blocks of artistic expression he sees in notes and chords. "Music is equal to art" says Brennan. "I look at both the same way, it's integral to my approach." It wouldn't really matter the medium in which Brennan chose to work. The impulse to create would be the same. It could put down the sticks and pick up a movie camera and still be coming from the same place".

Brennan's musical tastes run to Jazz, a form founded on improvisation and particularly sympathetic to virtuoso musicianship.

Some would argue that Brennan's adventures in sound are often not jazz at all. His willingness to alter and at times eschew the conventions of jazz as defined by purists would not be universally appreciated. "Jazz is a big word" he says. "It's a concept, an idea, not just a label". The drummer appreciates all types of music and in fact depends on them as a source of ideas.

The notes he writes on a page are guidelines to his fellow musicians. They are often suggestions intended to lead the band in a direction. Of course, to create out of thin air requires imagination and skill, so Brennan makes sure to surround himself with those inventive enough to share his vision. "These people are some of my favorite musicians" he says. "I'm lucky that they want to play with me, to play my music".

Brennan plays with both Aiséiri and a more Avant Garde band called *Viewfinder* at concert halls and on stages throughout Toronto and is a fixture in the city's vibrant jazz community. Last week he took his sound to a much larger audience with an appearance on TV Ontario's Studio 2. Host Steve Paikin praised the bands sound and according to Brennan, seemed genuinely appreciative of the performance.

Anyone wanting to learn more about Brennan and his band or in taking in one of his many appearances throughout the Toronto region can check out www.greggbrennan.com.