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Lara MacMillan Returns To The Classroom For Grade 8

Singer-Songwriter Brings Her Musical Show Grade 8 To The Toronto Fringe

Going back to her thirteenth year for inspiration, performer Lara MacMillan presents her storied concert **Grade 8** at the 2018 Toronto Fringe Festival. She is one of the site specific (BYOV) offerings at this year's Fringe and has chosen to mount the show in a classroom studio at Artscape Youngplace (180 Shaw St.). The building was formerly Givins-Shaw Elementary School and where MacMillan taught grade eight music twenty years ago. "I'm really looking forward to performing the show in a school classroom which is similar to the school I attended as a grade eight student," says MacMillan. "And, it provides an extra level of meaning for me that it will take place in a school where I taught music for two years."

A singer-songwriter with two full length CDs to her credit *Miss Mercury* (2008) and *Lara MacMillan* (2013), Lara has been experimenting with storytelling in a more theatrical/ cabaret way for a number of years. She started with a straight up tribute show *Lara Loves Leonard - a Cohen Cabaret* where she performed a selection of his songs and poems. Then came *Lara Loves Lennon* and *Lara Loves Lightfoot* "When I did the Lennon show I shared some of my personal stories between his songs and poetic writings and after the show a good friend said "You should do more of that" and I thought.... yes! That's what I want to do, connect personal story and public song." For years fans of her original music shows enjoyed the patter from the stage as much as the songs themselves.

She tried with middling success to bring a long story arc to *Lara Loves Lightfoot* "I was trying to do two things in one show," she says. "It was a tribute show on the one hand and on the other: stories from my nineteenth year living in Banff. As much as I love Lightfoot's music it wasn't what I was listening to that year, so there was a disconnect for me." **Grade 8**, which MacMillan has already performed at the Stratford SpringWorks Festival and London Fringe, ends up being a different kind of tribute show, one that celebrates a year (1980-81). MacMillan calls the form a storied concert and loves how it has come to life. "Really it's a one-woman-show-juke-box-musical and were talking 1980 radio-play so the music is SO much fun."

When MacMillan started pulling stories together for **Grade 8** she found that the central theme was the friendship she had had with one of her classmates, Sean. "There came a point when I realized that my show was his story as much as it was mine and I had to reach out to him to ask for his blessing." The two had been connected on social media but had not seen each other in over thirty years. "I sent him the synopsis and held my breath," she laughs. I really didn't know what I would do if he said "*Hell no!*" - I guess I'd have had to re-write it." Turns out Sean not only gave his blessing but travelled from Windsor to Stratford with his family for the show. "That was magic," says Lara. "And a little emotional for all."

What is the main take away for MacMillan now that the show is up on it's feet? "It's great to spend an hour with the thirteen-year-old me," she says. She was a hell of a kid."

Grade 8 runs July 7 - 13, 2018 - seven shows in seven days. For tickets and times: fringetoronto.com

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