

# Riverthieves



*The Bodhran's Celtic heartbeat underpins the dramatic landscapes imagined by skirling bagpipes and the mournful Irish whistle. Give me a fiddle and a glass of whiskey, and I'll tell you a story you'll almost remember...*

The core members of Eastern Ontario's Riverthieves have been playing music together since the turn of the last millennium. The house band at the Royal Oak on the Canal for seven years, this iconic, Ottawa pub overlooking Pretoria Bridge served as the band's original home base. Every St Patrick's Day for more than a decade, the band was the signature feature at the famous D'Arcy McGee's on Sparks Street. And weekend after weekend, the band could be found in bars and pubs from Renfrew to Trenton.

The Riverthieves clocked its flight time the old fashioned way: honing its chops on small stages over three-set nights, celebrating the world as they found it, pint by pint and song by song. Road-worn cases and old friends. Eventually, the bar gigs were interspersed with festival shows and small halls. Venues friendly to original music became more frequent and the Riverthieves began to present their own original music. In 2009, the band recorded songs and tunes they composed themselves during a very memorable live show at the Almonte Town Hall before a sold-out audience. It was released as their first album, *Bandit Queen*, the following year.

## **But that was before the war...**

Afghanistan tours for the two serving military members of the band began literally the day after that verdant, Victoria Day concert. Devon completed two tours of duty to Kandahar province and Finley one. Devon also deployed to Haiti in the wake of their terrible earthquake and was subsequently posted to Valcartier. During and after that time, the band lost its focus, playing only infrequently, and rarely its own music.

But the Fall of 2015 offered a re-ignition. With Devon's return posting to Ottawa, the Riverthieves' hyperactive engineer and commercial pilot feverishly constructed a rehearsal space and recording studio for the band in his hangar located in Carp, Ontario. In celebration, the boys set about an ambitious writing project and dedicated themselves to a second album and a return to the stage. Composing and arranging relentlessly through 2016, the lads completed songs at a rate of one per month.

Recorded between January and March 2017 by Mike Kay, and mixed by Chris

Bradley, the Riverthieves' first studio album, *Soldier*, consists entirely of original tracks. The album explores the Canadian military experience, past and present. It considers soberly the cost of service, celebrates the joie de vivre of the soldiering culture, and pays special tribute to family, home, loss and hockey.

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## **A nod to our Alumni**

Longtime Riverthief, the constantly-kilted and genre-crossing beatmaster Terry Kittmer, relocated to Nova Scotia in 2016. Drumming duties have since passed to Oscar Mullally.

A bevy of famous fiddlers have passed through the band's ranks over the band's long tenure: champion valley fiddler Terry-Lynn Mahusky; the gypsy-styled Finnish-Canadian Shanthi Minor; and the great, versatile session player, Greg Brown have all rosined up their bows in the service of the 'Thieves. Javier Mullally and the classically trained and Irish-inspired Evan Lewis currently handle fiddle duties for the band.

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## Finley Mullally

Riverthieves' frontman, Finley Mullally, quotes his father saying that a gentleman ought only concern himself with lost causes. Having been indelibly marked by his upbringing in the Toronto neighbourhood of Weston as a Leafs fan, "Maybe next year" is a more likely tattoo choice for him than "YOLO".

Musically, Finley is largely self-taught, although a year at the Royal Conservatory in Toronto followed by two years of study in classical guitar at Dalhousie University under Dale Kavanagh and the late Carol Van Feggelan served him very well. Picking up mandolin and bodhran with the Halifax-based, Alt-Folk trio, Gowan Brae, Finley played through the vibrant and exciting East Coast music scene from 1992-1995 with bandmates Sarah Hill and David Berger before relocating to Manitoba and then Ontario.

After a stint in the army (where he met Devon) and another as a teacher (where he met Chris), Finn tricked a girl into marrying him and having some babies (including bandmates Javier and Oscar). Now, the whole family unit splits its time between Perth, Ontario and Rock Barra, Prince Edward Island. Finley makes music and his wife, Leydin, makes art, and their three kids make both. They support this semi-nomadic lifestyle by teaching with the Ottawa Catholic School Board and by soldiering with the Canadian Army Reserve.

Finley plays a hand-made Fred Halpin bodhran, a Jean Larrivee acoustic guitar, a Godin Ltd Session electric guitar, all Canadian-made instruments. His precious acoustic mandolin is a prototype design, hand-made by bandmate and luthier, Sal De Meo. The only off-shore instrument in his stable is a Kentucky electric mandolin which he is hoping eventually to replace with an electric mandolin made by Ottawa-based luthier, Ian Weston if album sales allow.



## Chris Knowles

Originally from Kirkfield, Ontario (90 minutes northeast of Toronto), Chris Knowles currently plays acoustic rhythm guitar and performs vocals for the Riverthieves when he isn't calling fouls on the basketball court or living the "Geordie Howe dream" playing hockey with his sons in Ottawa beer leagues.

Chris spent his teen years taking Conservatory piano courses, listening to folk during the day and prog rock on late night FM radio. Finding it difficult to carry his trusty upright piano to weekend cottage bonfire parties, he gave up the keys, picked up the fretted strings and moved to Northern Ontario to teach math and physics to the uninitiated, and spend the weekends prospecting for folk songs in the black fly infested forests. He managed to infiltrate some local bands and was able to entertain at occasional kitchen parties, dinner theatre and provincial park theme days in exchange for leftover food and beer.

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In 1995, Chris decided to leave civilization and return to the South, but only got as far as Ottawa, where he first met Fin. The two of them formed a duo (the legendary Whiskey Dollies) and performed at local venues for several years, gradually adding band members until a new name was required, and the Riverthieves were formed. They specialized in "Celt-ified Canadian roots" covers, but over the years have added original tunes to the mix.

Now Chris is a part of the Grand new Adventure that is the New Riverthieves, incorporating new and exciting songs, instruments and sounds into music that is hoped will be as much fun for fans to experience as it is to perform.



## Sal De Meo

Inspired by the television production Rock Times Three which aired on a Toronto television station in 1977 featuring Canadian prog rock legends Rush, Sal De Meo realized that the basement-dwelling-Chinese-knockoff-guitar missing its treble strings finally had a purpose – awakening a passion for the four stringed rumble. A bass player for over thirty-five years, the Toronto-born musician has been part of the Ottawa music scene since 1987, performing a variety of genres, including rock, jazz, blues and folk. Sal's portfolio of instruments also includes guitar and is featured on several tracks on the Riverthieves' album Soldier.

Creative expression has been both an outlet and a means for Sal as the career designer has provided creative services to a diversity of clients for over 20 years. His repertoire includes graphic, industrial and furniture design, and more recently lutherie. Sal has delved into the world of stringed instrument making and has discovered a harmonious combination of design, build and sound. "There is something very exciting about sculpting and shaping a combination of static materials and releasing their dynamic potential," says the Riverthieves' bass player.

Ottawa is home to Sal, his wife Andrea, and their two children, however summers in PEI have made the island their home away from home. He can't think of a better place for writing songs and fostering music in their two boys.

Sal often finds himself thinking of the saltwater summers, the kitchen party jam sessions and the endless red sand shoreline... just in case you were wondering what this bassist is thinking.



## Evan Lewis

An Ontario boy now residing in Chelsea, Quebec, Evan is back for his second stint as the 'Thieves fiddling stunt man. Born in Toronto, he took his first steps and fiddled his first notes in Deep River, Ontario. Primarily classically trained, he studied privately with the Penderecki String Quartet's Piotr Buczek at Wilfred Laurier University and was a three-time finalist (and one time winner) of the Ontario Music Festival Association provincial finals. In the meantime, Evan soaked in the traditional sounds and feelings of fiddle music in the Ottawa Valley, Bruce County, and an extended stay in Ireland (Galway and County Donegal). Evan's musical style is heavily influenced by the likes of Ashley MacIsaac and the classical/ jazz virtuoso Nigel Kennedy, both of whom show that if you're not moving to it, sweating it, and breaking a few bow hairs, then maybe you're not doing it right.

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After a short stint with the 'Thieves in 2011-12, Evan returned to his globetrotting ways, taking his family to Switzerland for several years, before returning to the 'Thieves in 2018.

When he's not nurturing his three kids' love of music or doing his yardwork with a chainsaw, Evan works on international trade policy for the federal government, and might want to be a pilot when he grows up.



## **Oscar Mullally**

The youngest and newest member of the Riverthieves, Oscar Mullally, is a fan of indie rock, folk and alternative, including the niche folk-punk scene. A high school student in Perth Ontario, Oscar is a classically trained violinist and - more recently and more passionately - a self-taught guitarist and drummer. Oscar also loves electric guitar riffs, telescopes, manual typewriters and anything "old school".

Like his brother and bandmate, Oscar endured an early immersion in his father's dictatorial musical training programme, studying Suzuki and conservatory violin methods while being fully immersed in the world of collaborative, Celtic-style fiddling. Coerced into the Blue Skies Fiddle Orchestra almost as soon as he could hold a fiddle, Oscar also played in the Ottawa Youth Orchestra and the Lanark County ensemble, The Unspoken Rests.

Thank God for the internet which Oscar consulted in secret, teaching himself to play guitar. After sneaking lessons for months, he surprised his family one day, emerging as a fully-formed guitar player. In a fit of parental pride, he was rewarded with formal lessons and an American Standard Stratocaster which he fronts in his own age-appropriate band. Drumming, which began as an exercise on the Bodhran - a skill that Oscar quickly mastered - has progressed into a mild obsession. He has since graduated to a full kit and a spot as principal percussionist in his high school senior band.

Oscar notes that, with his inclusion in the line up, the band's mean age is now 32. He plans to study astrophysics after high school.



## **Javier Mullally**

Raised in Perth, Ontario, Riverthieves' current fiddler can't remember a time when he didn't have a violin in his hand. Javier Mullally was steeped in both traditional and classical forms, having been trained formally through the Suzuki and Conservatory systems and also fully immersed in Celtic fiddling since early childhood. In fact, he attended his first Irish "session" at three-weeks of age so it is fair to say that he is a "cradle fiddler".



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A committed music student, Javier has passed through the Royal Conservatory of Music programme as both a classical violinist and as a vocalist. Currently, he studies violin under Polly McCombe and vocals, music theory and keyboard under Heidi Stepanak. Javier has also taken full advantage of his summer residency in the Maritimes and has taken formal fiddle lessons with the legendary Richard Wood, Chrissy Crowley, Ward MacDonald and Sean Kemp. He has played in many youth orchestras, bands and ensembles. In addition, he also plays acoustic guitar, electric bass guitar and alto saxophone.

Javier has an abiding love for the theatre and has been acting, singing, dancing and performing ever since his first role as Gavroche in Les Miserables at the age of nine. Since then, he has performed many parts with the Perth Studio Theatre Company, the Perth Academy of Performing Arts, and the Perth Community Choir, most recently as the Fiddler in Fiddler on the Roof.

Javier is currently preparing for final RCM exams and university music auditions.



## Alex De Meo

Alex De Meo, eldest son of 'Thieves bassist, Sal, has been assisting the band for several years lending a hand in many different capacities. From ticket taker, to merch sales, to stage hand, Alex now finds himself out front as the band's sound engineer. Alex is also an avid guitarist and bassist, and plays second bass for the 'Thieves whenever his dad slides over to guitar.

Aspiring to a career in computer science, the Ottawa-born high school student continues to develop his song writing craft, and finds that mixing sound for the band is a nice combination of art and science.

Alex is a fan of rock, hip hop, prog rock and indie folk.