

# This week's Muskoka Mosaic: Introducing Andy McLean



**GOOD VIBES:** Andy McLean strums his guitar. McLean, who has recorded hit singles with several bands, co-founded the North by Northeast festival in Toronto 15 years ago to promote new and emerging Canadian musical talent.

By Paula Boon

Music and soccer have never failed Andy McLean. "I found Linda, my life partner, through music, and made many friends through soccer, especially after I first came to Canada," says the Mary Lake resident.

McLean grew up in a working class family in Manchester, England — "It was just like Coronation Street," he says — and his childhood dreams were to make an album with a band and to play for Manchester United.

He often listened to music on "pirate radio" stations which broadcast from the

international waters off the coast. "It was a really exciting time: the beginning of commercial radio in the U.K.," he says.

McLean and his friends also gathered to watch television shows that featured live bands. "We watched the hands of the guitar and drum players to see what they were doing," he explains.

Although McLean was initially most interested in drumming, he focused on the guitar when songwriting caught his interest in his teens. When he went to London to pursue a degree in humanities, McLean left his drums at home, took his guitar and started hooking up with people to play at various clubs and make demos. "I was never the lead singer," he says. "I sang backup and harmony and wrote songs."

After a post-graduate degree in counselling, McLean worked with troubled teens for three years. Then, in 1982, he realized all he really wanted to do was to play music. McLean quit his job to seek his fame and fortune in Canada.

Soon, McLean and some new friends formed a band called The Tenants, which signed with Sony. They made an album including the hit single *Sheriff* and toured the country, headlining some shows and opening for people like Simple Minds, Tom Cochrane and Rush.

After making another album, The Tenants broke up in 1987, and McLean signed

to Polygram Records with another project called Double Dare. Another hit single, *Can't Hold On*, resulted.

McLean then decided to do more behind-the-scenes work as a staff songwriter, freelancer and consultant listening to new songs for labels. For Intrepid Records, one of the first independent labels in the country, McLean created compilation CDs for new bands and arranged showcases for upcoming Canadian acts in different parts of the world.

His exposure to different music festivals, most notably South by Southwest in Texas, led him to become a founding partner in the North by Northeast (NXNE) festival in Toronto. "As the structure of the music business was changing, people needed a place to come together and network," he says.

The festival, now in its 15th year, showcases the best new and emerging acts from across Canada and around the world in various clubs and on outdoor stages. It lasts five days each June and about 250,000 people come to hear close to 700 bands perform. NXNE, which can be found online at [www.nxne.com](http://www.nxne.com), has grown to include a film festival for music-related films, a conference and an interactive digital aspect, plus an annual fundraising soccer game at BMO Field, home of Toronto FC, between musicians and members of the media.

McLean says he enjoys providing an out-

let and forum for new creative talent. NXNE staff listen to about 3,000 submissions each year and everyone is always excited to find hidden gems. "It's all about sharing music: finding something you like and sharing it," he says.

McLean and his singer/songwriter partner Linda McLean bought their property in the Mary Lake Highlands in 1989. After camping there for several years, they built a home and moved in permanently in 1998 when their daughter Alice was four. The couple, who keep an apartment in Toronto as well, also have two grown children from Linda's previous marriage.

The work he and Linda have done together in their music studio has been rewarding, McLean says. "I had hung up my guitar for some years, but I'm enjoying playing and writing with her. She's a great singer and great writer, and it's amazing we get to do this together."

Looking to the future, McLean says he doesn't have any particular plans. "I just have faith if I follow those tracks I've been following, music and soccer, it'll lead me to where I need to go," he says. "I'm so fortunate. Life is good."

Thanks to Jenny Cressman for suggesting that Andy McLean be profiled. To explore the complete collection of Muskoka Mosaic profiles, go to [www.thelifecollector.com](http://www.thelifecollector.com).

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