

# new canadian modern

cdn culture shock

twitch: Greyhound Nation

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## Greyhound Nation

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by [Barbara Bruederlin](#)



[Allison Brown](#) has managed to do what Radiohead couldn't. When Tom Yorke was pouring over tea-stained maps of North America, planning that leg of 2008's world tour, he envisioned traversing the continent by rail, as both an environmentally conscious and a romantic mode of transport, but had to abandon the notion when he realised the infrastructure simply did not exist. When the road called

Allison Brown this summer, the folksinger from London Ontario was able to answer with an economical and environmentally aware response – I'm taking the Greyhound.

Her pilgrimage to Protection Island was both the fulfillment of a dream to return to the enclave of traditional roots music legend, David Essig, to record her second album under his tutelage, and the starting point of a western Canadian tour, a tour dictated more by the whims of a Greyhound schedule than a show per night agenda. It proved to be a tour awash in long hypnotic gazes as the scenery slowly unfolded outside the bus window, morphing from the glass towers of Vancouver, through the heart-stopping grandeur of the mountains, across the vast expanse of prairie, and finally stopping on a nickel in the heart of the Canadian shield. For a roots songstress who spends much of her time in a campus radio station or working as the graffiti hookup in an independent record store, it was pretty exhilarating stuff.

A woman and her guitar on a solo Greyhound bus tour across western Canada strikes me as an unbearably romantic notion tempered by a gritty reality, but Allison is much more pragmatic. "I needed to make this trip happen overland so I could stop along the way," she explained, when we talked after her show at the Ironwood Stage and Grill this summer. "The time was right and the repertoire was there for a new album project."

Protection Island offered the perfect escape needed to bring her vision for a new album to life. Culminating with a house concert with David Essig, the experience of once again recording with the master roots producer proved magical. "David can create a scenery around the songs," Allison muses. "I'd wake up in the morning and Dave would be listening and doing overdubs and he'd say 'I got it – this is gonna sound like Hank Williams when he played the part of Luke the Drifter' or 'this track is like Flatt and Scruggs when Earl played the guitar.' David's ears guide him through the whole process. He just knows so much about trad and roots music that he can offer to complement the songs."

The resulting album, *Viper at the Virgin's Feet*, will be released on May 8, 2010.

After more than two weeks wrapped up in the headiness of recording and in forging a soulful connection with west coast island life, it was a bittersweet moment when Allison finally clambered aboard that Greyhound bus, armed with her guitar and ukulele and an ipod loaded with road trip songs.

The gigs were both sublime and surreal. The show in Banff stretched out into a double, with Allison being asked to come back the following night to open for Louder than Satan. “They weren’t even that loud,” she complains with a laugh, “it was a little disappointing.”

There was nothing disappointing about the record stores that presented themselves en route, though. With an independent record store being an integral part of her life and livelihood, Allison made it her mission to seek out all the best haunts. Turntables in Victoria and Zulus in Vancouver, with their eclectic mix of vinyl and vintage video games, were definite highlights. Fascinating Rhythms in Nanaimo struck a chord with her by its similarity to Grooves, her home store in London. “I was there an hour and a half between buses and I almost started answering the phone,” she laughs.

The whistle-stops also proved rich fodder for Allison’s expanding collection of musical connections to showcase on “For the Folk”, the program she hosts every Wednesday evening from 8:30-10 on CHRW 94.9, the University of Western Ontario’s fm radio station. After six years, the show has become a vital part of her existence, and when we spoke, Allison was starting to succumb to separation anxiety. A trifle wistfully, she muses “some people get massages, I do my radio show.”

But the extended absence from her beloved radio program will ultimately reap rewards for this wayward musician. In addition to the Ontario folk, acoustic blues, and bluegrass musicians she regularly champions on her show, Allison is excited to celebrate, over the course of the dark damp London winter, the fellow musicians she encountered along Greyhound Route 5000. She’s returned home with a suitcase filled with cds, a renewed passion for community amongst musicians, and plans to marry the camaraderie of the road with the power of the airwaves. All that and a wrinkled bus ticket stub at the bottom of her purse.

\*\*The photo was taken in 2009 at heritage building in London, ON called “the antiques shop”, which is pending demolition. Photographer = Mike Bourgeault

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Catch Allison Brown live at:

CD Release Party – Chaucer’s Pub, London, ON – May 8/10

TourOnto – Toronto, ON – Feb 28 to Mar 2/10

Islands Folk Festival – Duncan, BC – July 23 to 25/10

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