

Matt Osborne



Matt Osborne's energy and voice lit up stages across Waterloo Region for many years, but it was his small acts of kindness behind the stage that distinguished him as a friend.

Osborne, who died in his sleep at the age of thirty-two, was known for his ability to communicate in song and to share deep friendships. After the singer and songwriter's death in 2004, people posted letters on his website expressing their sadness over the loss:

"I was Matt's next door neighbour and friend," wrote one young man.

"I can honestly say that Matt was the best influence I've had in my life so far . . . I am 17 now and I've known Matt since I was 7 . . . I remember that he played in my grade 6 class because I had to do research on a band or musical artist and present it to the class . . . Matt was the first person to see my violin after I got it . . . He was the first person to see my double bass . . . he even wrote a string quartet for me called Ruminations."

Another local musician wrote, "Over the years, Matt attended many of my gigs. I can remember playing to 3 – 4 people, and suddenly Matt would show up. He always made me feel better about slow nights when he was around."

Osborne came to Waterloo to study English at Wilfrid Laurier University, but it didn't take him long to break into the local music scene. Over the years he performed as the Winnebago Blues Band, the Matt Osborne Duo with Christine Bird, and the Matt Osborne Band with bassist Serge Solski and Percussionist Arun Pal. He also helped young musicians produce their own CDs as president of a university club known as the Musicians' Network.

After releasing two solo CDs in the mid 1990s he created the Matt Osborne Band and released *man versus concrete* in 2001. His final CD – *Matthew Osborne* – was released after his death. Osborne, known for his unique style of combining blues, folk, rock and country, started taking lessons as a teenager through the YMCA and later sang in a folk choir at church. He described himself once as a "solo folky guy" who, in addition to singing, could also play the guitar, harmonica and bass.

Musician and broadcaster Jian Ghomeshi said after Osborne's death: "I cherished his humour, his charisma, and his ability to communicate real emotions on stage and in person. His energy was infectious; his voice strong and accessible, his guitar-playing impressive."

Osborne was perhaps best known and loved for his open jam sessions every Tuesday night at the Circus Room in Kitchener. It was here that he put so much energy into

helping young musicians. After his death, friends established the Matt Osborne Musicians Trust Fund to help local musicians produce their own CDs. He had been preparing to embark on his third cross-country tour before his death at his mother's home in Toronto. It was a journey he was anxiously awaiting. "I play live all over the freakin' place and I don't just like it . . . I NEED it. Playing in front of an audience is something that I believe that I was put on earth to do."

Photo courtesy of the Waterloo Chronicle.