



# the **Good- Getting- Older** songs & stories tour

Four-Time Juno Award Winner

## **Bill Usher**

and the space heaters

**Paul Pigat \* Holly Hyatt \* Steve Briggs**

With his rare gift of communicating “good-getting-older” life experiences into memorable songs and humorous reflections, Bill Usher creates an evening in the theatre that brings the generations happily together in a head-nodding appreciation of those universal truths that happen in families as some grow up while others grow old.

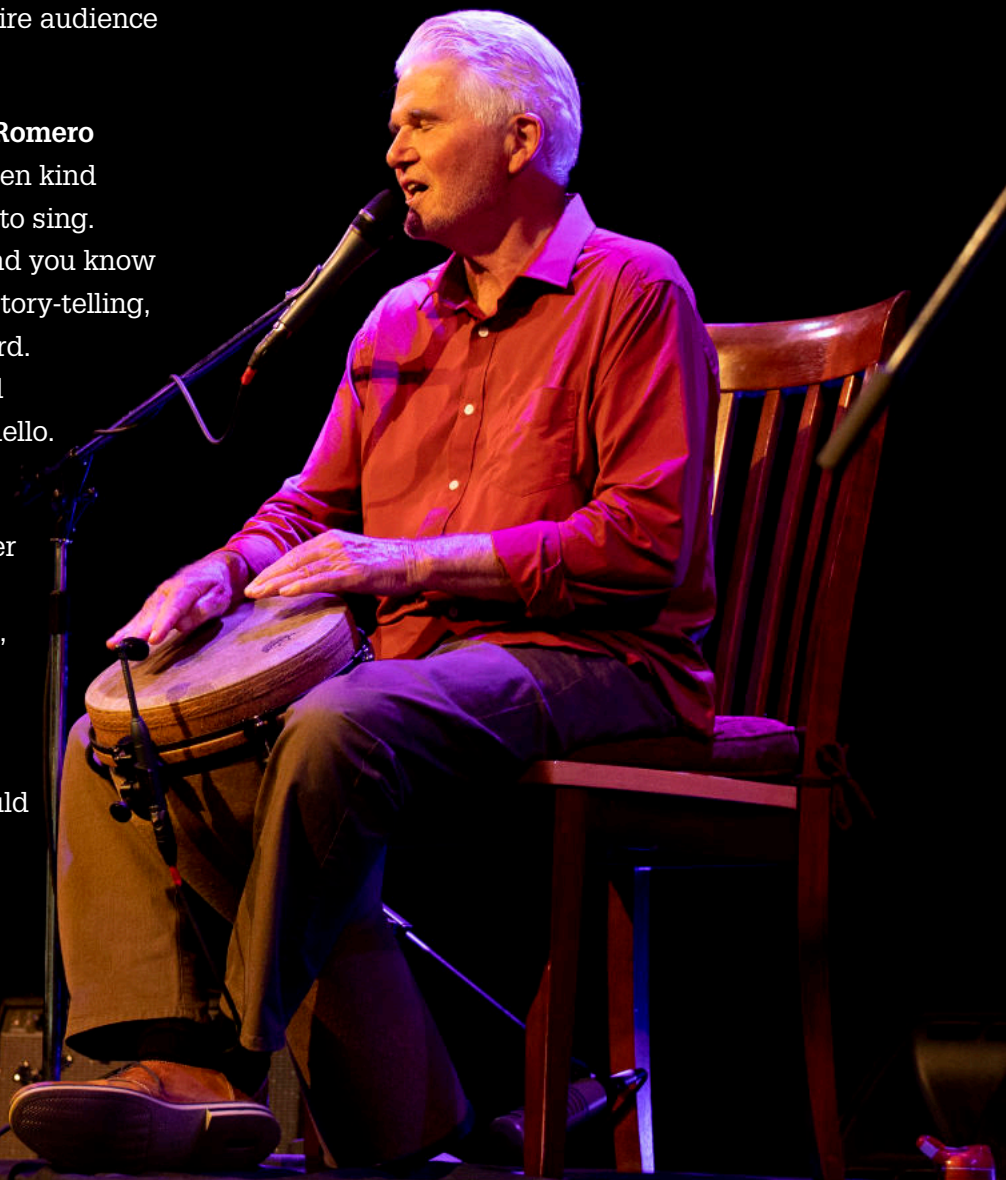
Opening the concert with an acid flashback to his hippie days playing the bars of Toronto's Yonge Street, Bill Usher teasingly asks us to refer to him not as a senior but, as an 'Esteemed Elder' noting that "seniors get a bad rap for forgetting stuff." It's true, he says, but in defence he riffs "All my life I've been stuffing more and more wisdom into this brain and as I take in more and more stuff in the front end ... stuff has just gotta drop out the back end to make room, right?"

And then they're off. For the rest of the evening Bill Usher and his excellent bandmates **Paul Pigat**, **Holly Hyatt** and **Steve Briggs** groove their way through a bunch of songs that lyrically recall significant events of Usher's up-and-down journey toward the light of love and understanding. **Chris Frye** of The Bills says, "Bill has somehow found that magical combination of fresh vitality and seasoned wisdom in his show. His songs are personal yet universal, moving the entire audience to laugh, sigh and sing along."

Four-time Juno Award winner **Pharis Romero** says, "It's a head-turning-stop-and-listen kind of moment when Bill opens his mouth to sing. Sometimes he gently speaks to you, and you know you're experiencing years of singing, story-telling, yelling, whispering and loving it so hard. There's always a pulse and groove and he writes hooks like most people say hello. Welcome home, friend."

Acclaimed singer/songwriter/performer **Coco Love Alcorn** got a sneak peek of the tunes in the show and commented, "I've invited Bill to sit in on stage and play with us. But all these years and I didn't know he was crafting these great songs... and I didn't know he could sing like this! Bill's easy charisma, with these great songs, and his voice and groove, and that spark! I want to be in that audience! I know there will be magic."

One audience member at a recent show emphatically agreed. Referring to herself as Millennial Mom she wrote, "My partner and me got a babysitter for the kids and came to the show with my mom and dad. It was so cool to share those laughs and pokes with each other. And beautiful songs that made me tear up. It was awesome!"



Four time Juno Award-winner Bill Usher could be one of the most accomplished but, not-so-famous people in the world of Canadian music and arts.

Beginning in the late 60s, this self-taught percussionist has performed, toured and recorded with several festival's worth of well-known artists, from Bruce Cockburn and Ronnie Hawkins to Valdy, Willie P. Bennett and Stan Rogers.

He's produced 60 albums, most notably the first four ground-breaking albums for Sharon, Lois & Bram, five acclaimed album's with Sesame Street's Bob McGrath and another for his buddies Big Bird & Oscar the Grouch and many, many more receiving numerous Gold and Platinum records along the way. And, yes folks, that was Bill who arranged & produced and played on those iconic SL&B tunes Skinnamarink, One Elephant, Five Little Monkeys, Peanut Butter and dozens more!

Add to that his four-year freelancing stint with CBC Radio where he worked with Sylvia Tyson and Peter Gzowski researching, producing and hosting four dozen documentaries on such diverse artists as Taj Mahal, Ewan MacColl, and the Preservation Hall Jazz Band. Performing with Bruce Cockburn on the 1977 Circles in the Stream tour Bill created a [two hour documentary](#) of the cross country tour that was aired on CBC Radio's Special Occasion.

He won his fourth Juno Award in the mid 1980s for [DRUMS!](#), an album and solo stage show that he performed hundreds of times in cross-country tours. Later, he wrote and performed two more musical/theatre shows – *Sonofadrum!* and *Lover, Father, Husband, Son, Baby Boomer with a Drum!* – explorations of family life that were presented widely in theatres and at Fringe Festivals across Canada.

During the '90s, Bill emerged as a songwriter releasing two albums with his band The Space Heaters [Tuning In To Different Waves](#) and [Baby Boomers Go Boom](#). Two notable gigs involved playing Peter Gabriel's WOMAD festival in Toronto and Festival Rhythme du Monde in Montreal.



By the early 2000s while working as the Ontario Arts Councils' Performing Arts Touring Officer he created a whole album's worth of songs with the release of

[Slowdancing in the Ballroom of Life](#). The album is a deep dive into the challenges and rewards of surviving into middle age; a thoughtful and groove-filled look at, mostly the good things about getting older. From gospel-tinged hints of redemption to the sort of love songs that can only be written after you've lived through love for a very long time, *Slowdancing in the Ballroom of Life* had a lot to say and said it very well indeed. "These songs have already sung their way into my

life," wrote Dugg Simpson, longtime artistic director of the Vancouver Folk Music Festival. "They're about things that I have lived and about things that I am living, in a musical language that I can understand."

Pursuing a long held dream to leave the city behind, Bill and his wife moved west in 2002 and settled in Golden, BC. "Pete Seeger's elder advice to me backstage at the Mariposa Folk Festival in the '70s, was my 'north star' growing older," says Usher. "Pete told me, 'You don't find community. You make community.' So simple, yet so powerful."



• Sharon, Lois & Bram Singing 'n' Swinging with Bill Usher & the Mammoth Band •



So Bill started volunteering for the small Golden arts council and was soon appointed the artistic and executive director leading [Kicking Horse Culture's](#) phenomenal growth these past 20 years. Playing a strategic leadership role in the \$3.3 million restoration of the dilapidated Civic Centre into the town's performing arts theatre, Bill was honoured with Golden's Community Development Award in 2012. Mayor Christina Benty said, "Bill has proven time and again an ability to hold and sustain vision while working shoulder to shoulder with those on the ground. Over the breadth of his career, this has translated into a litany of impactful work in numerous cultural industries and truly sets him above and apart."

It goes without saying, the pandemic shut down was a revelatory time for artists. "As a curator and presenter of hundreds of music, theatre and dance performances over the past two decades, I spoke to so many artists during COVID who despaired — questioning themselves, their identity, and their future. That struck a major chord with me," Usher says. "I'd been away from performing regularly for many years but that wonderful feeling that comes from delighting an audience still simmers and I asked myself, if now's not the time to go back out on the road, then when?"

Usher has developed a rare gift of communicating 'good-getting-older' life experiences into lyrics that are relatable and universal. He brings an elder's perspective that is not common in today's indie folk/pop music by crafting lyrics that are direct in expressing matters of the heart sung upon melodies that are simply beautiful. Dugg Simpson adds, "These are the kinds of love songs that a kid can't write...and surely shouldn't sing. Finally somebody singing songs about life that resembles the one I'm living through these days."



The last word goes to Bill, "Hey don't forget to tell folks about the groove," Usher laughs. "I've been drumming for over 50 years now, so you know there's going to be a groove! Playing with my excellent band mates Paul Pigat, Holly Hyatt and Steve Briggs is a blessing for an old guy like me ... they are so good."

"He brings an elder's perspective that is not common in today's indie folk/pop music by crafting lyrics that are direct in expressing matters of the heart sung upon melodies that are simply beautiful."



# Introducing **The Space Heaters**



**Paul Pigat:** aka Cousin Harley, Paul's been named by one guitar magazine as the greatest rockabilly guitar player in the world! Hailing from Vancouver, Paul not only tours with his own bands but sits in with many others. [paulpigat.com](http://paulpigat.com)



**Holly Hyatt** hailing from Winlaw in BC's Slocan Valley, Holly is in demand on the west coast music scene with her own Holly Hyatt Band and Holly & Jon. [hollyhyatt.com](http://hollyhyatt.com)



**Steve Briggs** originally from Powell River, Steve has played with Bill for over 20 years and with Canadian greats like Russell de Carle, Sylvia Tyson and Quartette, Carol Baker, Murray McLauchlan. Steve leads his own band The BeBop Cowboys and is in high demand as a [session guitarist and teacher](#) in Toronto.



“

All the way home in the car we talked about how his songs and stories evoked memories from our life together and with our grown-up kids. A beautiful night in the theatre ... so much fun.  
*signed 'Esteemed Elder grandparents'*

“

Such a happy show. Even more so with a delicious tear in my eye! Thank you!  
*signed 'So Glad We Came'*

“

How did a four-time Juno winner, a first-rate professional conga player, a major TV series writer and producer, a veteran recording artist, a sideman who toured with Bruce Cockburn and producer of Sharon, Lois & Bram — how in short did Bill Usher manage to infiltrate the Atlantic Fringe Festival without flights of angelic trumpets or at least a 50-piece brass band to announce his coming? Expertly paced and delivered this is a funny and touching piece of work enlightened with original song and super-charged drumming, in which Usher recalls significant events of his own journey toward the light of love and understanding. This show is a big time Fringe hit!

Stephen Pedersen, *Halifax Chronicle Herald*

“

Whitehorse rocked, beat to the rhythm, laughed and danced for a week to Usher's heartfelt honesty and warmth.

Michele Emslie, Yukon International Storytelling Festival

“

These are songs that provide a make-you-move tearful with words that make you 'moved' too, touching tender places you thought were yours alone. Give yourself a treat. Listen to the stories Bill Usher has to sing. They are our own simple truths sung in the air for us all to feel.

Linda Page, Adlerian Psychology World Conference

“

We were lucky enough to share a concert stage with Bill. What a fantastic performer! He has somehow found that magical combination of fresh vitality and seasoned wisdom in his show. His songs are personal yet universal, moving the entire audience to laugh, sigh and sing along.

Chris Frye, *The Bills*



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tour 2024  
2025

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