



BUSINESS VOICE

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PEOPLE OF THE YEAR

THE MANY FACETS OF
BROOKES AND FIONA DIAMOND

HALIFAX'S BUSINESS MAGAZINE

DIAMONDS

IN THE ROUGH WORLD
OF ENTERTAINMENT



By Lynne Wells

When Brookes Diamond started out in the entertainment/music industry, there weren't many rules.

It was every man for himself," he says. "There was no structure, no design, so I had no pre-conceived notions about what my career should be. It truly was a frontier industry."

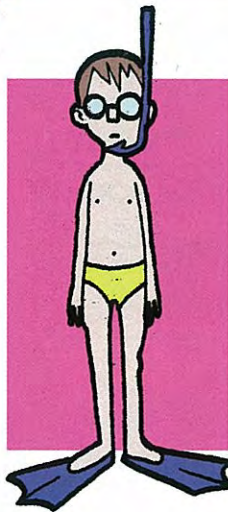
Brookes had intended to pursue a teaching career, but got sidelined by meeting Denis Ryan of Ryan's Fancy when he was asked to run the entertainment portion of Dalhousie University's winter carnival in 1971.

"I was there to get a degree in education," says Brookes. But what he learned led him away from the classroom.

The CRTC had just instituted regulations stipulating more Canadian content had to be played by radio stations across the country. Artists such as Bruce Cockburn, Murray MacLauchlan and Valdy were in demand.

"The talent to fill those airwaves was here, but they needed promoting," he says. "I had been hooked by the music and was just launched into the industry. It was a very entrepreneurial atmosphere, very creative and inspiring. I stumbled upwards!"

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Memorable Moment #1

"People were just starting to come through the gates for the Great Big Picnic with Great Big Sea, on Citadel Hill, when the heavens just opened up," says Brookes. "I'm there, looking out at the crowd, and I see a guy standing there wearing a bathing suit, flippers, snorkel and goggles. He was prepared. It was a proud moment."



MUSIC

Very eclectic. Fiona likes opera and musical theatre; Brookes enjoys Johnny Cash and celtic sounds. "We like it all, especially local talent like Lennie Gallant," Brookes says. "Although we have to admit we still have a CD collection," Fiona says. "Our kids have everything on iPods and MP3 players, but we still have CDs."

PETS

Cat and dog. Their dog Rocky is named after their Rockwood Avenue address.



FAMILY

Two boys and two girls. Despite growing up on the fringes of the music/entertainment business, the kids didn't think their parents were cool. "What kids think their parents are cool? However, their friends thought we were really cool," Fiona says.

BREAKFAST

Porridge with Nova Scotia blueberries for Fiona and Miniwheats for Brookes, unless kippers are available and then Fiona has to put up with the fishy smell.



PASTIMES

Listening to music, reading a book and drinking a glass of Annapolis Valley wine in front of the fire on a rainy day. "We love to golf, too," Fiona says. "We're passionate, really bad golfers." Brookes adds that sailing is a favourite activity as well. "You haven't truly experienced all that Nova Scotia has to offer unless you've spent some time on the water. I love to get out in the boat."

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For more than 30 years, Brookes and his wife Fiona have operated Brookes Diamond Productions Ltd., a full-service entertainment company based in Halifax that offers consulting, booking, concert promotions, management and production services for a variety of musical and entertainment acts. Brookes serves as president and Fiona is vice-president.

Past and present clients make up a "who's who" list of Nova Scotia and Canadian talent, including: The Rankin Family, the Barra MacNeils, Rita MacNeil, Sharon, Lois and Bram, Bruce Guthro, Bette MacDonald, Maynard Morrison, Ryan's Fancy, Aselin Debison, Gordon Lightfoot, Bruce Cockburn, Valdy, Lennie Gallant and more.

"I love the music, I love this part of the world, and I feel like I have been living a dream come true," Brookes says. "I never wanted to go away from the Maritimes, and I feel for each and every Maritimer I've ever met while traveling on business who says to me, 'I want to go home'. I wish with all my heart they could."

If there's one thing, Brookes would change about his fellow Maritimers (the ones still here) if he could, it's what he believes to be their cavalier attitude about the natural beauty around us, and the musicians we seem to take for granted.

"Many tend to underestimate the value of our artists and poets," he says. "They hold up our sky for us. We are so blessed to have these people. The talent from this region is an unending flow. No matter how much talent we can showcase, there's always someone else right there."

Nova Scotia-born stars such as Hank Snow, Anne Murray, Wilf Carter and John Allan Cameron had to leave Nova Scotia in order to gain their fame. Brookes says that should never have to happen again to any artist.

Fiona Diamond says at one point, in the early days of the company, she spent just as much time on the telephone explaining where Halifax, Nova Scotia, was on the globe as she did pitching her clients or trying to lure acts here.

"It was tough to bring in touring acts back in those days," she says. "The entertainment industry operated out of London, Nashville, Los Angeles, and Toronto, to a lesser degree. Halifax was too far away from everything. But we've made huge strides as an industry,

and I don't to have explain anything anymore. It was a challenge, there's no doubt. But we climbed that mountain."

One mountain that still seems to offer treacherous footing on slippery slopes is local government.

"We've seen our industry gain legitimacy in the eyes of the local business community," Fiona says. "They buy tickets, they sponsor shows, and they're learning the potential investment opportunities that abound in the entertainment business. That's good. Provincially and federally, our industry gets a lot of support."

But Brookes says, "What we aren't seeing is the same support from the City of Halifax. We've got the talent to make Halifax a cultural capital of Canada. Our artists have that 'can do' attitude. Our local government doesn't. It's like culture thrives here in spite of them. They don't offer enough support financially and there are too many regulatory roadblocks. Our nightlife, the clubs and lounges are struggling mightily to survive. We've just seen too many events squashed because they've been regulated to death. We need a city administration that understands, encourages and fosters our entertainers."

If the local support is lacking, the Diamonds have found a recipe for success with out-of-towners.

"I love to get artists or their managers from far away here to Nova Scotia," Brookes says. "Once we get them here, we have them forever. People fall in love with this part of the world."

He relates a story of a New York lawyer, his wife and another couple, whom the Diamonds brought to Nova Scotia.

"We took them to a place we have in Chester. The moon was just coming up over the horizon and the pot was boiling over an outdoor fire, just ready for the lobsters. We had them out cruising in Chester Harbour by midnight... And we knew they were all ours. They said the visit was a highlight of their lives. We're still friends with them. It's the same reaction from anyone we do business with internationally. People love it here. We need to remember that and celebrate it."

In his desire to showcase not just local talent, but Nova Scotia itself, Brookes and company created and produced (in partnership with Music Nova Scotia) DRUM!, a unique musical spectacular that celebrates both the diversity and unity of Nova Scotia's four

Recommended...

"There's such a deep well of talent here, we don't want to leave anyone out," Fiona says. "Yes, Cape Breton is still a phenomenal source of talent — look at fiddler Anna Ludlow, and Pink Thunder, a three-piece girl pop band from Richmond County — but we're seeing rising stars from other areas of the province. There's Christine Crawford from the South Shore with her alternative folk sound and Jordan Croucher from Halifax with his hip hop sound. Old Man Luedecke, a banjo songwriter/performer, also from Halifax, is very entertaining. We've also heard Aislin House, five sisters from Newfoundland, and they are awesome. We just have so many talented, smart, disciplined and determined artists here. It's very exciting."

major cultural groups. Acadian, Black, Celtic and Aboriginal rhythms are showcased individually and together with music, songs, video and dance performances.

"Our artists are so rooted here — the music and the lyrics just flows from the land and the sea," Brookes says. "Our success is recognized on stage, where we knock 'em

dead, but it's all homegrown from the small communities scattered around the province. There's a connectedness to our music, and that's very comforting."

Fiona Diamond says there's one aspect about Maritime living that has proven to be a real dampener to their career.

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Wake up and smell the attitude.



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1971

Brookes Diamond attends Dalhousie University, pursuing an education degree, but is unsure if it is the right career for him. He coordinates a musical event during Dal's Winter Carnival and meets Ryan's Fancy. "Things just went from there," says Brookes. "The Rebecca Cohn had just been built and the CRTC had just instituted new regulations regarding Canadian content for radio play. We needed to promote local talent, and we had an empty concert venue, and I was looking for something to do."

1975 - 81

Brookes Diamond Productions organizes and runs Atlantic Folk Festivals on Moxam's Farm in the Hardwood Lands in Hants County, N.S. The event is famous for the rain, mud and great times. "20,000 people gathered in farm fields. It was one great big outdoor cultural explosion — our very own Woodstock," Brookes says.

1980

Brookes Diamond Productions is managing Rita MacNeil's career. "Those were the heydays," Brookes says. "We were filling concert halls around the world."

1995

Brookes Diamond Productions creates, in partnership with Music Nova Scotia, a world-class show called "Drum!," promoting four Nova Scotia cultures (Acadian, Black, Celtic and Aboriginal) through their four distinctive drumming traditions.

1997 - 2007

Fiona Diamond creates, co-produces and sells the Halifax Comedy Festival. "It was one of three major comedy festivals in the country," Fiona says. "It was an event that was hugely supported by the CBC regionally. It's tragic to hear about the cuts CBC has faced. Our local talent wouldn't have achieved the success they have without the support of the CBC."

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"It rains here — a lot! Outdoor venues are often a nightmare given the weather in Nova Scotia. The Atlantic Folk Festival was famous for the rain that fell on the audience. Great Big Picnic, with Great Big Sea, was a great big wet event. We've given up on large outdoor events here."

Fiona also doesn't care too much for pot-hole season either, but otherwise, "We're the poster children for Nova Scotia. We're crazy about it. It's the best place to live, work, raise your kids and have fun."

Fiona was born in England, and has lived in Ottawa, Montreal and areas out west, but settled in Nova Scotia and has no plans of budging. Brookes hails from Newfoundland originally and called New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island home before discovering Nova Scotia.

"We raised our four children in Halifax, and while they've all chosen to see a bit of the world and study elsewhere, we're hopeful they'll return," Fiona says. "Brookes is like the father in 'My Big Fat Greek Wedding' with four little cottages right next to our place."

In fact, Brookes seems to love kids no

matter whose they are. According to Fiona, despite the fact that their own children, now ages 20 to 25 years, have outgrown the need for a backyard skating rink and don't even live in the vicinity, Brookes is still out behind the house every winter building a rink.

"All the neighborhood kids are out there shooting pucks around night and day. Half of them we don't even know!"

"Outdoors in Nova Scotia is 50 per cent of the deal of living here," Brookes says. "You've got to experience the outdoors, both on land and on the water. The ocean isn't just something nice to look at. It's an intrinsic part of the whole package of living here. You've got to taste it, even if it's just for a few hours every summer."

What about that rain that bugs Fiona so much?

"That's when we sit in front of a fire with a book and listen to music," Brookes says. "I call it my enforced contemplative time."

"We love to read," Fiona adds, "and we love to socialize. There's very little quiet time, even with the kids gone." ✕

Memorable Moment #2

"At one of the Atlantic Folk Festivals, we had a record amount of rainfall," he says. "The creek overflowed, the manure pile slumped over onto some tents, and a house trailer was torn apart by the flooding. All across the farm, you were up to your knees in water. We figured we'd better go around the tents and check on everybody. We mustered up a legion of volunteers who went out into the fields with lanterns and flashlights. What we found were people sitting in their tents, up to their chests in water. Most of them had rigged up floatation devices to hold their drinks and they were having a whale of a time."

When we got back to the stage to check on the musicians, they were gone. Someone said, 'Follow me.' We were led around the stage to a side, lifted up a board, and found 30 to 40 of the finest musicians from the region huddled together, with a bar set up, having a huge jam session. It was 3 or 4 a.m. and they were going wide open. It's times like these that you pinch yourself to make sure you're not dreaming."

