



[Back to Festival takes root in Niagara](#)

## Festival takes root in Niagara

August 23, 2007

GREG QUILL

"What I learned was that you only find satisfaction in music by doing it your own way," St. Catharines singer-songwriter Roger Marin said in a recent interview, about the lessons he took with him after a six-year stint as pedal steel guitarist and bus mechanic in renegade roots music star Fred Eaglesmith's band.

"Right or wrong, you should do it the way you feel it. Don't rush, just work hard and do it right."

Marin has lived and breathed music for most of his 32 years, traveling as a teen with his father – a peripatetic country music artist who plied his trade in bars and beer halls all over Ontario – then as a protégé of the charismatic Eaglesmith, with whom he often worked more than 200 shows a year as a member of The Flying Squirrels, alongside Canadian folk music legend and mandolin picker Willie P. Bennett, musician/comic Washboard Hank, bassist Darcy Yates and drummer Kevin Komatsu.

Marin still hooks up with his old band mates when their paths cross, as they did last weekend at Eaglesmith's annual festival/picnic/camp-out in Aylmer, Ont., where the young songwriter had his own concert spot on Saturday, before joining the Squirrels in their big evening performance.

Sidelined and forced to rest after a heart attack three months ago, Bennett also performed a solo set, and looked in excellent shape, reported Marin, who just completed his own 47-date solo tour to the Yukon and back, promoting his second solo CD release, the much praised country-folk collection High Roads, recorded in his St. Catharines studio a year ago, and mixed by Eaglesmith's producer, Scott Merritt.

The father of two daughters, Marin hasn't been able to spend much time with them in the past year. Following the Eaglesmith instruction book, he has been almost constantly on the road, building his fan base two or three at a time.

"My plan is simple: to make as many records as I can, to keep touring as much as I can – I love being on the road – and to keep building my audience. If two people show up, I don't sweat it, because I know next time there'll be 50 ... well, maybe 20 or 30."

For the first time on this last tour, Marin continued, he didn't actually make money, but he didn't lose any either. That means no downtime gigs as a mover or a mechanic or a mower of lawns.

But all he can focus on this week are preparations for Cicada Fest, the first of what Marin hopes will be an annual roots music festival in Niagara Falls.

As if his professional life weren't complicated enough, the songwriter has taken on the unenviable burdens of a festival promoter and artistic director, bringing together artists from across Canada and the U.S. – "songwriters I've seen on the road or worked with and admired," he said – for a three-day event in a wooded, 22-acre site, the Serbian Picnic Ground in Niagara Falls, which includes a huge covered amphitheatre, seven separate staging areas with running water and bathrooms and a camping ground, with a swimming pool, nearby.

With the help of Port Dalhousie, Ont. photographer and music fan Tom Lepp, Marin has managed to organize an impressive bill of primo roots music artists whose only expectations are the enjoyment of each other's company from tomorrow night through Sunday night, Marin said. The list includes Romi Mayes, Tom Wilson, Barnhouse Static, Susan Gibson, Jesse Reid, Gordie Tentrees, Joe Lapinski, and many more.

"It didn't start out as a big event, but when word got around people started calling me, wanting to be part of it. The only thing they asked for was accommodation, which I'm paying for. If there's money at the end of the weekend, so much the better."

Most of the other hard costs of Cicada Fest – promotion, sound and lights, security –are being provided free or at reduced rates by companies, that, like the Sleeman brewery, see some advantage in sponsoring the event. The Niagara Falls Serbian community is even kicking in with an open-pit barbecue.

"It was the only way I could get the musicians and songwriters I like in one place at one time," Marin said. "And there's nothing else like this in the whole Niagara region."

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Just the facts

**WHAT:** Cicada Fest

**WHEN:** Friday to Sunday

**WHERE:** 6085 Montrose Rd., Niagara Falls

**TICKETS:** \$30 weekend pass at [www.cicadafest.ca](http://www.cicadafest.ca), or at the gate