

Letting opportunity find you

WRITTEN BY ALISON MACPHERSON

WHEN Brad Steckel explains his enthusiasm for his work, he offers the description "like a hot puppy on a shady patch of grass." The image conjures up visions of a happy, purposeful, completely absorbing moment. It's this joyful commitment that has attracted opportunity throughout his career in music.

Educated at Berklee College of Music in Boston, Steckel is a multi-instrumentalist, vocalist, writer, arranger, producer, engineer and owner of Calgary based Nevin Park Recording. A genuinely down to earth guy, he's reluctant to list the names of superstars who have shaken his hand. Instead, his brushes with fame (Madonna, Sting, Paula Abdul) are casually mentioned in conversation as a necessity when talking about his work. "The guitar wind has blown me to a lot of places," says Steckel. That statement provides insight into a career that on the surface might seem more by accident than by design.

Success has found Brad Steckel while he was busy getting good, really good at what he does. The formula of preparing for opportunity and being willing to walk through the door when it opens has served him well. Rather than pursuing a well defined course, a voracious commitment to developing his talent has attracted invitations to contribute to many projects with both tangible and creative rewards.

In 1988, Steckel was lured from the U.S. to Calgary by Dan Lowe, inventor of the revolutionary 3D audio technology known as QSound. The technology is used on music CDs, movie and television soundtracks and has been licensed by Sony, Intel and others. Joining a small group of pioneers at the inception of Calgary based QSound Labs, Steckel's 10 years there led him to the position of Chief Audio Engineer, lending his expertise to some of the most renowned recording studios and artists in the world.

Working with the recording industry elite in Los Angeles, New York and Nashville, Steckel observed "The most talented, accomplished and passionate people were also the most humble." His ability to fit comfortably in such an environment is largely credited to his professional disposition. In the music business that often boils down to knowing your role on a creative team and not letting egos get in the way.



Currently, Steckel is back in the glory of playing guitar in 8 shows a week at Stage West Theatre. The initial call to sit in with the band came from a fellow musician needing a short term replacement about 10 years ago. It eventually became an occasional gig and for the past several years he's played in every show at Stage West that has required guitar. Having played 4 different instruments in one of their musical productions, Steckel believes his versatility has contributed to keeping the coveted steady gig. As well, a very tight schedule and the demands of a live musical require constant grace under pressure - something that comes as second nature through years of experience.

In contrast, the studio environment allows a freer pace in which to apply his verve. Steckel has produced and engineered several projects for Calgary based artists in the past few years but his reach extends far beyond the city with a concept he calls "the unistudio". Through the marvels of technology, he can provide vocal and instrumental contributions to projects happening across town or on the other side of the world. Again, his "love of and excitement for the creative process" shines through.

In his 30-year career, one principle has let "the guitar wind" provide opportunities for Brad Steckel. Being great at what you do is how you get there in the first place, but being the kind of person that others want to work with is what gets you invited back.