

## A local tribute to The Last Waltz

*Billy Bob Productions celebrates 40th anniversary of historic concert on Nov. 25*

By **Walter J. Lyng**  
The Suburban

*The Last Waltz* is and was so much more than the sum of its parts. The iconic 1976 concert served not only as a farewell for The Band, but also acted as a once-in-a-lifetime congregation of some of the most influential musicians of the 1960s and '70s, including Ronnie Hawkins, Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, Eric Clapton, Muddy Waters and Van Morrison.

This year will mark the 40th anniversary of *The Last Waltz* and, as a means of paying tribute to this great moment in music history, Mitch Melnick's Billy Bob Productions has put together a concert scheduled for Friday, Nov. 25 at the Corona Theatre, which will see a variety of mainly local musicians covering some of these much-loved songs.

"I didn't want a carbon copy of the film," says Melnick of Martin Scorsese's concert movie. "The easiest thing to do would have been to just cover all the same songs. I wanted this show to be more about The Band itself and that era and what they helped to create."

Arcade Fire's Tim Kingsbury will lead a super group with Hotel2Tango's Howard Bilerman alongside country singer Angela Desveaux, Juno Award-winning rocker Matt Mays, Tom Wilson (Blackie & The Rodeo Kings), acclaimed Toronto indie band The Wooden Sky, Montreal guitar virtuoso Shane Murphy, singer-songwriter Chris Velan, Mack MacKenzie of Three O'Clock Train, Scarlett Jane, local rising stars John Jacob Magistry, and Daniel Moscovitch's new group, High & Mighty.

"Every musician that I've spoken to, including some people who I've never met, are so psyched for this," says Melnick. "They're going to end up collaborating with people they've never played with and they want to."

"We had a talent budget and we came pretty close to our limit. We wanted to bring in people from Ontario because that's where The Band is from."

That last bit of information is a fact that



PHOTO: WALTER J. LYNG / THE SUBURBAN

**Billy Bob Productions' Mitch Melnick with Montreal guitar virtuoso Shane Murphy, one of the many musicians covering some of the much-loved songs.**

often slips by the wayside. While Levon Helm hailed from Arkansas, Rick Danko, Garth Hudson, Richard Manuel and Robbie Robertson were all very much Canadian.

"The Band is considered to be one of the pillars of Americana or Roots music," says Shane Murphy. "I lived in Toronto for a little while and The Band is huge there. Toronto, in many respects, is a sort of alt-country city, musically. There's a lot of country nights and I don't mean Toby Keith. And yet, four out of five members of The Band were Canadian. People don't really get it because they toured with Bob Dylan and all of that."

A fan of blues and more traditional rock, Murphy says it took him a while before he fully appreciated *The Last Waltz* and the Band's catalogue of music.

"I remember seeing it a couple of times initially and not really knowing what it was because I wasn't really into that stuff at the time," he says. "One night I realized how cool the film was and took notice of how it was put together."

"Their sound is interwoven into what people listen to. I could play you 10 songs from The Band and you'd recognize all of them."

Perhaps one of the best concert films of

all time, *The Last Waltz* is a great piece of cinema, partially because of Scorsese's direction but mainly because of the dynamic between the band members and their invited guests.

"Each band member is a character study unto itself," says Murphy. "They all have different personalities and they're all hilarious, but they're also sad because it's the last concert and you can see that some of the guys wanted to continue. But if you removed any one member, it wouldn't have been that unit anymore."

This will mark Billy Bob Productions' second major concert of the year, following the Bob Dylan tribute show a few months ago at Club Soda on the occasion of his 75th birthday.

"The fact that the Dylan show went as well as it did made me want to do something else," says Melnick. "I immediately began to think about other big anniversaries coming up."

While Melnick's first instinct was to try and book surviving Band member Garth Hudson, he was beaten to the punch by a concert promoter in New Zealand with the same idea.

"We decided to go with the strength in numbers approach," he says. "We put our heads together and filled out the lineup."

For more information and tickets, visit [www.theatrecorona.ca](http://www.theatrecorona.ca)

The Band founding member Robbie Robertson will be on stage in conversation with host Arne Legace Dowson at Saputo Stadium (4092 Royal Ave.), Lower Canada College on Friday, Nov. 18, at 7 p.m. where he will discuss and sign copies of his new book, *Testimony*. Tickets available at Paragraph Bookstore (2220 McGill College Ave.) and LCC Senior Library (4099 Royal Ave.). One lucky Suburban reader can win a ticket to the event as well as an autographed copy of the book by sending an email with contact information to [anthony@thesuburban.com](mailto:anthony@thesuburban.com) with the subject line reading **ROBBIE ROBERTSON BOOK**. A random winner will be notified on Thursday, Nov. 17 at 3 p.m.

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