

GOOD PEOPLE Sam Roberts Band plays the Whistler Summer Concert Series on Aug. 22.

PHOTO BY DUSTIN RABIN

‘We don’t allow ourselves to be hypnotized by the past’

THE SIX-TIME JUNO-WINNING SAM ROBERTS BAND REVISITS WHISTLER ON AUG. 22

BY **DAVID SONG**

ONE OF THE SAM ROBERTS Band’s less-heralded songs, “The Last Crusade,” features a chorus that goes like this:

“You play the king and you play the pawn, you give up and you soldier on, this is the last crusade we’re on, this is the last crusade we’re on.”

Such words might be interpreted as a microcosm of Sam Roberts’ entire career, which he spent alongside lead guitarist Dave Nugent, keyboard whiz Eric Fares and James Hall on bass. Even relative newcomer Josh Trager has manned the drum kit for 20 years already. They’ve accomplished lots: six Juno award wins, 14 nominations, spot No. 59 on Billboard’s Top 150 Overall Selling Canadian Artists list and more than 125 million streams.

This level of success does not materialize overnight, and the double-Platinum-selling crew has had to navigate plenty of obstacles along their way. Roberts, Fares and Hall have been together since high school, and sharing the same jokes for 30-odd years is in itself a challenge.

“The measure of our success, in our own view, is that we’re still driven and forward-thinking and ambitious as a band,” says Roberts. “The trials we face are almost never mentioned … being in a rock ‘n’ roll band for 25 years is going to have its bumps in the road as well, and those are the things that help to galvanize the spirit of a band. We don’t allow ourselves to be hypnotized by the past.

“Can’t overstate how important it is that you feel a sense of connection with the people you play music with. That goes beyond the music itself because you have to share your whole life with them. It’s not just my love of music, it’s their love of music as well, and so you have this responsibility to one another—to embrace the things that could happen but also to see yourselves through the more difficult times. If that starts to break down, the dominoes start falling.”

‘IF YOUR LIVES DEPEND ON MUSIC, THEN YOU SHOULD COME AND CHECK US OUT’

Roberts released his debut EP, *The Inhuman Condition*, in 2002 under his own name. By 2011, when “The Last Crusade” dropped as part of the album *Collider*, he and his gang had rebranded officially as Sam Roberts Band.

They’ve gained enough clout to play alongside AC/DC and The Rolling Stones at times. Folks like Jim Barber describe their music as possessing “a unique spirit” with “infectious” melodies, “deep and somewhat enigmatic” lyrics, and a mix of subgenres that is difficult to categorize.

Ask Roberts of his personal opinion, and the answer is more straightforward: they’re a rock ‘n’ roll outfit comprised of musicians who pour as much energy as humanly possible into each show. He also has a separate gig called Anyway Gang: a collaboration with Dave Monks of Tokyo Police Club, Chris Murphy from Sloan and Menno Versteeg of Hollerado.

The last Anyway Gang album released in 2019. Roberts quips that he and the others are “always threatening to make another record” and hopes to do so when an opportunity presents itself. Until then, the Sea to Sky corridor awaits.

Longtime Whistlerites might have attended multiple Sam Roberts Band concerts over the years, and the band itself is very excited to return.

“Anytime you get to marry such an incredible outdoor setting with music—barring the fact that we’re probably scaring the wildlife off a long ways—it’s a very unique opportunity for a band that cut its teeth playing in beer-soaked punk rock bars and dark, dingy spaces,” Roberts reflects. “When you get to go outside and play music under the stars, it invokes a different feeling in the show and certainly you see it in the audience.

“We try to play like our lives depend on it, so if your lives depend on music, then you should come and check us out.”

On Aug. 22, the pre-show in Olympic Plaza will feature DJ Whitness at 6:30 p.m. before the Sam Roberts Band struts its stuff an hour later. Visit whistler.com/events/concerts to learn more. ■

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