

Ont., in 2001, where Kendra owned a hair salon. They married in 2003.

Meanwhile, Lewis launched his solo career in the form of the Ryan Lewis Project, releasing *Fight for Love*, an inspirational album that debuted at Ottawa's Bluesfest and received airplay on urban music stations in North America and the Caribbean.

After the couple moved to Kingston, in 2011 they were blessed with twin boys, Malachi and Ziggy. At the same time, Lewis was busy connecting with local Kingston musicians, including Emily Fennel and Spencer Evans. "I was playing the circuit in Kingston in no time, which was fun." He also started a Top 40 band, which still performs.

After Lewis dreamed up what would later become EMS, he enrolled in St. Lawrence College to study marketing as a precursor to launching the business. "I love being an entrepreneur, not knowing what to expect," he says.

The pandemic means he's been lately focused on adults and professionals who don't need to be in the room with him — unlike his younger artists, whom he misses greatly. The pause, however, has also had an upside. "It can be a struggle to balance work life and family life," says Lewis, whose music studio is located right above his wife's business, Elevation Hair. "I've had some time to reflect on what's really important and to realign."

The family often chills out at their Rideau Acres trailer. "Our boys love outdoor activities: fishing, soccer, swimming, bike riding, and evenings with a camp fire and s'mores."

Asked about future plans, Lewis calls EMS "this glowing ball that I want to keep shining" and says that his mission is both musical and philosophical. "My whole life I've tried to get people together. Collective efforts move us forward, as a family, and that's what I'm modelling at the studio."

He aims to inspire people to push beyond their limitations. "We can't allow ourselves to make excuses for the past or present," Lewis says firmly. "It may be part of who you are, but it doesn't dictate who you're going to be."

Imagining how to expand the Elevation brand is also on his mind. "I want to keep creating — no, I have to keep creating," he says with a laugh. 🎧

Elevation Music Studio:
elevationmusicstudio.com
The Ryan Lewis Project:
theryanlewisproject.com

STRIKING A CHORD

NEW LOCAL MUSIC

The Gertrudes releasing new album

BY JORDAN WHITEHOUSE

When The Gertrudes got together last summer to record the song *Forced Eviction*, in support of the temporary residents at Belle Park, it marked the end of an almost eight-year hiatus for the Kingston folk collective.



It also marked the beginning of a new album, *Emergency to Emergency*, which will be released on November 26 via Wolfe Island Records.

The irony of it taking a pandemic to get the band back together isn't lost on guitarist and vocalist Greg Tilson. But given the themes of the 12 tracks on the new album, it also makes sense, he says. "We're writing about what we're seeing in Kingston and in our neighbourhood of Skeleton Park, how our community is beginning to wake up to these hidden pandemics — homelessness, addictions and mental health, domestic violence, environmental degradation, white supremacy."

For example, the title track — proceeds from which are being donated to Kingston's Street Health Centre — reflects on the anxiety and isolation created by COVID-19 and faceless economic forces. The fourth track, *Parham*, commemorates the devastation experienced by the hamlet of Parham, just an hour north of Kingston, when a gunman opened fire there and burned a church to the ground last year. Proceeds from that track are going to the Canadian Mental Health Association.

Musically the songs on *Emergency to Emergency* are inspired mostly by 19th-century Irish, Métis or North American fiddle tunes, but Tilson says the album delivers on The Gertrudes' "folkestra" reputation. While the core band features Tilson, Pete Bowers, Annie Clifford, Paul Clifford, Jason Erb, Josh Lyon, Jason Mercer and Matt Rogalsky, over 50 other artists participated in the making of the album, including members of the Kingston Symphony and the Open Voices Community Choir.

"It was a pretty unique experience to write an album like this during a pandemic," says Tilson with a laugh. While the band did have a few physically distanced recording sessions at local churches and at The Isabel, most of the album was recorded in backyards. "It was hilarious trying to set up a traditional recording in a backyard with sounds of birds, dogs and lawnmowers — and you'll hear all those things — but it also created some really wonderful moments."

The Gertrudes may play shows in different parts of Canada in support of the album, but for now the focus is on local, with release concerts planned for Wolfe Island and Kingston.

"We have a history of touring the country," says Tilson, "but right now it just feels great to really settle into our neighbourhood and community and make that a priority." 🎧