

Bringing home the harvest

Ivan Rubenstein-Gillis to perform at Westwind Orchards

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BSP Reporter

*"It's so fantastic, I'm so alive
Let's get in the car and go for a drive ..."*
-- Ivan Rubenstein-Gillis, "Fantastic"

Ivan Rubenstein-Gillis moved to the Rondout Valley when he was 7. After graduating RVHS with the class of '89 and "bouncing around college a bit," he headed downstate to pursue his passion for music. On Saturday, Sept. 2, he's inviting everyone to come give a listen to the results at Westwind Orchard in Accord -- and the tunes will be as savory as the freshly ripened fruit.

Rubenstein-Gillis came by his love of music honestly. "My namesake, my grandfather Ivan, I never got to meet him, but he had a fanatical love for music that got passed down. My parents had just an incredible record collection, from classic rock to world music and everything in between."

Then there was Aunt Verna: Verna Gillis, ethnomusicologist and producer, whose studio Soundscape was part of Ivan's life both upstate and down.

"Verna never had kids, but she's a very family person," he said. "I got exposed to these mixtapes of everything from West African music to the absolute best of whatever was going on in New York at the time. Her first husband, Bradford Graves, exposed me to wonderful sculpture, and now there's Roswell" [trombonist/composer Roswell Rudd, Verna's partner for many years].

Growing up in the Kerhonkson of the late 20th century, Rubenstein-Gillis "realized when I was about 9 that all I wanted to do was write songs. I fell in love with the process, the words, the music, putting it together ... The woods and farms gave me the open space, and then I took all that back down to the city. I was a little bit savvy, but still innocent and green. Luck is incredibly important in life, and I had some luck, found my way into some good scenes and people who validated my music outside my family. I did all sorts of things: played gigs, recorded, accompanied some great people, taught private lessons, started producing at a little studio in my apartment. I coached other bands. I was as adaptable as could be. And I had a few different situations where people were basically patrons over the years; I feel very lucky that people felt my vision and music were worth supporting."



Roswell Rudd and Ivan Rubenstein-Gillis playing at The Living Room, a club in NYC and rehearsing together.

If that sounds like a heck of a broad and deep education, it has been -- and Kerhonkson has been a contrapuntal melody in the song all along. "I brought a band up and played [Accord] the train station, but it's been a few years," he said. And of course, he's always hung out with Verna and Roswell.

"Ivan and Roswell have been collaborating in one way or another for many years. Ivan is multi-talented as a songwriter/performer, and producer," said the proud aunt. "Roswell has sat in on Ivan's sets over the years and guested on his CDs and loves playing with him."

"Ivan writes wonderful songs, plus he is a great musician full of touches that are his alone. He is a true composer," said Rudd.

"I have become quite familiar with Roswell's unique voice, catalog and approach over the past 15 years," said Rubenstein-Gillis. "We've worked together consistently for the past eight years or so. I played with his MaliCool band for a short while, produced the lead track from his 2011 album 'The Incredible Honk,' and then did a major collaboration with both Roswell and Verna on his 'Trombone for Lovers' album. Some things stand out: his unique musical voice and vision, his sincerity, his commitment to music, his positivity, his 'big' ears, his big musicality, his gentle sense of humor, which is right there in his playing. And his love of dissonance. I learned a lot from that! We continue to work together on his new compositions, so I figure that I can (happily) keep learning ... Roswell has sat in with various iterations of my band over the years. Always love that, and he's always invited."

Other influences Rubenstein-Gillis credits over the years include Beat poetry (he once blew a kiss to Allen Ginsberg, which the poet caught), classic rock icons, world beat masters, absurdist humor and social theory. At the Westwind concert, expect to hear an eclectic mix.

"I've dabbled in many genres," he said, "and I hope to present a sampling of some of these moods at the concert -- from my acoustic singer-songwriter material to jazz

and world music-inspired electric guitar instrumentals and beyond. What I've been up to the past few decades. I feel like I've learned a lot, and I'm excited to share it with people who haven't seen me in a while."

Rubenstein-Gillis is happy to have been invited to do so at Westwind, where his audience can enjoy music along with brick oven pizza, fine cider and fresh produce.

"It's almost surreal going back there now," he said. "The roads still look the same, but there's that much more cosmopolitan influence ... it feels very dynamic, and I've gotten to a place where I can connect to my fondness for the beauty and the people. I think we're all hungry for sincerity right now, and music is one of the greatest forces for good, for joy, for contemplation, for positive action and for good old-fashioned social cohesion."

The free family-friendly concert takes place 5-7 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 2; come on down and feast. **BSP**

westwindorchard.com And check out Ivan's Facebook page