

# MAN ABOUT TOWN: MUSICIAN MIKE COWIE

*Local musician Mike Cowie clearly loves what he does. After decades in the business, he never tires of the feeling he gets when he tilts his coveted 1949 trumpet in the air, letting the smooth, jazzy sound he is known for reverberate into the audience. Cowie's varied career has seen him play with some of the greats, from B.B. King to the Temptations, and produce music for film and television along the way.*

Q&A by: *Tiffany Thornton*

## TELL ME MORE ABOUT YOUR WEEKLY GIG AT THE PRESS GANG?

We perform every Friday and Saturday night. The music is always changing and evolving. We take classic rock and pop songs like Prince and Sting, then change them up to make them sound deeper using bigger chords and creating different tempos. They are still the same song, but different.

## WHERE DID YOU DRAW YOUR INSPIRATION FROM TO BE MUSICALLY INCLINED?

We had some amazing music teachers in Halifax. They developed programs in all the schools for instrumental music; they formed an all-city for the kids that were really into music. It was all about working hard, and the teachers were driven to not limit us to what we could do. The experience got me away from negative stuff. Once that door opened, I discovered improvisation, and that's been my whole thing since.

## YOU HAVE PLAYED WITH A REPERTOIRE OF AMAZING PERFORMERS LIKE THE GREAT B.B. KING. HOW DID THAT COME TO BE?

B.B. King came into Middle Deck when I was 16. I was performing with the late jazz saxophonist Bucky Adams, and B.B. King was in town for three days playing at the Queen Elizabeth auditorium. The last night he showed up at Middle Deck; he came in and got a standing ovation just for walking in the door. He sat and listened to us play and then sent his guy to get his guitar. This was just around closing time, and then the owner of the venue got up and said, "I'm locking the doors. Anyone who wants to leave can leave now, anyone wants to stay — I'll make you breakfast!" We played all night. It was an incredible night.

## HOW DID YOU GET YOUR FIRST GIG?

Blues/jazz musician Dutch Mason gave me my first gig. I was a high school kid. I was getting out there at 16 playing with Bucky Adams. They used to put me out back when the liquor inspector came by because I was so young.

## CAN YOU CREATE YOUR OWN INFLECTIONS WHEN PLAYING THE TRUMPET AS YOU GO?

Yeah, that's the thing about the trumpet; it's a huge scale. You can play so quietly and so softly that you can melt people. Or you can take it through the roof. It has a huge dynamic range.

## YOUR UNIQUE STYLE IS TO IMPROVISE A LOT ON STAGE. HOW DOES YOUR BAND FOLLOW THAT?

Improvisation is collective in the way I play. When we play I will pick a song that has a feeling I can relate to. Then I can take an arrangement and change it to suit the way I feel. It's like a sketch and every night we paint different colours. Music is a gift; not just for me but also for the people listening.

## WHAT DOES PLAYING MUSIC REPRESENT FOR YOU?

Everything! I love getting in front of people. That's why I am playing restaurants and clubs in order to develop the improvisational thing. You have to do it on stage. Rather than doing six concerts a year like some guys do I want to work every week.



## CATCH MIKE COWIE LIVE!

### FRIDAYS AND SATURDAYS @ 8:30pm

The Press Gang  
5218 Prince Street, Halifax  
(no cover)

### SUNDAYS @ 6:00pm

Morris East  
620 Nine Mile Drive, Bedford  
(no cover)

### JANUARY 14, 2016 @ 7:00pm

The Craft Beer & Local Food Celebration  
Halifax Marriott Harbourfront  
(tickets online at: [localconnections.ca/events](http://localconnections.ca/events))