

# Out IN THE City

**A QUEER IN RIVERDALE DOESN'T BODE WELL.**   
The lows of Riverdale high >27

MIC & DYKES

## Crooner

Slack's mainstay Heather Bambrick is making pop gestures



Heather Bambrick packs a punch on jazz tunes. Now, she's branching out.

Serafin LaRiviere

**E**AST COAST JAZZ SINGER HEATHER Bambrick is a sonic antidote to Lady Gaga's heavy production and Britney Spears' heavier breathing; cool, clean and packed with personality, Bambrick goes from seductive cooing to full-throated belting without digital voice doctoring or pantyless limo rides.

Her first album, 2004's *It's About Time*, snagged Bambrick two nominations and one win at the National Jazz Awards and helped land her a show on Toronto's Jazz FM. The follow-up CD, *Those Were the Days*, was picked up by stations across the globe and cemented Bambrick's reputation as one of Canada's premier jazz talents.

Bambrick's latest project is a trio called the V-Girls. It is a bit of a departure. Along with bandmates Elana Harte and Kim Sheppard, Bambrick has been rocking out with original tunes and exploring new genres of music.

"It's completely different for me in terms of what I usually do," she says. "It's not jazz; it's rock and country and pop and roots music all thrown into one big bag. Plus, I get to be drummer in this gig!"

The three began playing together four years ago as a one-off for Pride, which led to further gigs at Slack's on Church St. Frequent appearances at the club have garnered a solid fan base — as well as a firmer grasp of playing drums while singing.

"It was hard at first," says Bambrick. "People would come up and tell me I looked constipated on-stage, but really I was just concentrating on playing and singing at the same time. It's easier now. I don't look as constipated anymore."

It's been quite a journey for the curly-haired chanteuse from Newfoundland who couldn't even afford the airfare to audition for the University of Toronto's venerated jazz program.

"I was so broke," Bambrick laughs. "I sent an audio cassette tape for the audition, but I didn't think I'd be accepted."

John Thomas, the director of U of T's Jazz Choir must have liked what he heard. Thomas was heading out for the St John's Jazz Festival that summer and stopped by to audition Bambrick personally. She made the cut, relocated to the Big Smoke that fall and never looked back.

"There's just such a vibrant jazz community here," says Bambrick. "Oddly enough, St John's, Newfoundland, is not the jazz mecca of North America."



### the deets

**HEATHER BAMBRICK WITH ACCOMPANIST DIANE LEAH**

Sun, May 16, 6–9pm  
Slack's Restaurant  
562 Church St  
416-928-2151  
> [slacks.ca](http://slacks.ca)

UP CLOSE

# ROUND TRIP

Novelist, former model and travel nut Jeffrey Round

James K Moran

"**THE GAY SENSIBILITY** informs everything," Jeffrey Round says. "We are the heroes, the villains, the victims — we are the ordinary, everyday person on the street."

Round is talking about the world he created for Brad Fairfax, the star of a multi-novel project he's been working on for half a decade.

The novels started slowly — publishers were weary and reception was initially cold — but interest in Fairfax, a gay special agent with a penchant for travel, is on the rise. In fact, in the small world of Canadian queer publishing, his books are fast becoming sugar-coated, beach-read literary mainstays.

*Vanished in Vallarta*, the latest thriller starring Fairfax, exemplifies Round's style, combining travelogue with adventure. Round deliberately sets his mysteries — arguably closeted literary novels — in queer resorts.

*Vallarta* is the third book in a seven-part series published by Cormorant Books. The series came about after years of knocking on publishers' doors.

Rewind two decades to a younger Round. As a model in his 20s, he fled heartbreak by going overseas, eventually fictionalizing his experiences in *A Cage of Bones*, his first novel. Cadent, cautionary and sometimes overwrought, the coming-out story depicts a model who abandons suburban Toronto to descend into the inferno of the modelling profession.

Round admits that his love of writing got in the way when he wrote the original 1,000-page manuscript for *Cage*, later paring his prose down to 300 pages for marketability. After three years of rejections from Canadian houses, Round looked elsewhere, despite wanting to publish here first. Within three months, both a British and American publisher expressed interest.

It was British publishing house Gay Men's Press that published *Cage*. Because the book received generally positive reviews, except in Toronto (as has been the case with most of Round's books since, he says), Round expected publishers to pounce on his second book, gay literary novel *Queerzone*.

They didn't. "I gave up on that one and thought 'What I'm not getting is markets,'" Round recalls. "Okay,



DAVID HAYE

looked out the window and saw a man spying on them with binoculars.

"I flashed him," Round says. "Then I had a flash of my own — somebody being spied on, somebody being shot at. This whole mystery unravelled before my eyes."

Round returned home, dizzy with inspiration. Resolute that he wouldn't spend another five years working on unsellable material, he wrote fast, finishing *The P-town Murders* in 18 days.

The Fairfax motif, replete with hot cops, drag queens, burned-out heirs, shady nightclub owners, tough-as-nails lesbians and literary references, was born.

Haworth Press published *P-Town* in summer 2007. Three months later, a larger company bought Haworth and closed its fiction arm. Later that year, Round's agent resold *P-Town* to Cormorant. Publisher and editor Marc Côté asked for a series.

Ostensibly mysterious and suspenseful, the books include many rewarding asides, particularly about queer life. Round admits he sees Oscar Wilde as his ideal reader and aims to titillate, amuse and shock the dandy. Certainly Wilde would appreciate the bawdy references, depictions of well-endowed men and portrayals of the love that dare shout its name.

Round is currently penning commercial thrillers and a young adult novel set in Mexico, all under pseudonyms. As he works on about three books a year, Round doesn't want to saturate the market.

"It's a tough market," Round says. "You have to write everything you can to get published and be noticed. You're 'known' for writing one sort of book, then you can narrow it down and follow that path, if you want. But why not do everything? Earlier generations of Canadian literary writers looked down on 'genre' writing, whereas I think it's the new frontier. Thus, Bradford Fairfax and his 'Neon Noir.'"

"I love doing both," Round says of literary and genre fiction. "Obviously, the Fairfax books make me laugh more, but my idea of fun is writing a really extraordinarily beautiful passage."

Luckily for readers, Round manages to do so in either style.

*Vanished in Vallarta is scheduled to come out this June.*

what sells? Well, books about heterosexuals sell, love stories sell, books about war sell."

Round started writing about a Canadian photographer who, fleeing the Bosnian War, seeks solace with her family in rural Ontario. The book would become *The Honey Locust*, eventually published last fall.

"When I couldn't sell *Locust*, I thought 'Where's the market?'"

Round remembers. "The market is the US, basically, for English-language books. Then write something for the US. Stop writing for Canada, stop writing for Europe, stop writing for here and there."

Round and his then-new boyfriend visited Provincetown, Massachusetts, in 2003. Round experienced an epiphany while stepping out of a Jacuzzi. He