

Laval musicians play their way into history at Montreal International Jazz Festival

Arden Arapyan, Mike Gasselsdorfer and friends win coveted and prestigious jazz music award

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Article mis en ligne le 11 août 2008 à 10:20

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Barely born, the Arden Arapyan Jazz Ensemble is well on its way on an illustrious path to stardom, having recently won the coveted General Motors Grand Prix of Jazz award at the 2008 Montreal International Jazz Festival. For the past 20 years, this award has served as a springboard for future stars of Canadian jazz. The prize acknowledges and rewards originality in the creation and delivery of jazz music. Ten Canadian groups squared off at the world-renowned Montreal International Jazz Festival, most of whom were a lot more seasoned than the Arden Arapyan Ensemble.

"We were confident, but our group is in new territory, trying to break new ground. We know some of the groups we competed against, they're friends of ours, people we admire. Among them were even some of the university teachers who taught us jazz!" confess Arden Arapyan and Mike Gasselsdorfer, both of Laval. Arapyan is the group's pianist and leader, Gasselsdorfer plays drums.

Following the group's performance under an overcast sky on the evening of July 2, the jury was quick to recognize the talent the ensemble brought to the stage. Their success brought them back to the festival on July 5 for an outdoor performance as part of the *Gammes* series, and later that evening at the opening of the closing ceremonies marking the 25th anniversary of the Justin Time Record Company. The group was also invited to return for the 2009 Montreal International Jazz Festival and its counterpart in Rimouski.

Propulsion Jazz

The General Motors Grand Prix of Jazz is not a first for Arden Arapyan. In autumn of 2007, the group took top prize in the instrumental category of the Propulsion Jazz radio contest, organized by the *Couleur Jazz* radio station, a stunning achievement, considering that the group had only been together for a month. "Each week, we went into the studio with a new composition. It really forced us to work. One night a week, I would find a melody, and we would improvise on it," recounts Arden, whose group took all the marbles at the *Espace Dell'Arte* competition last November 18, alongside vocals winner, Josée Goulet, also of Laval.

For the occasion, the Arden Arapyan Trio, which includes bass player Kyle Morin, surrounded itself with different musicians, three of whom went with them to the Montreal International Jazz Festival – Andi Pema (percussion), Giovany Artega (sax), and Vagharshak Adamian (clarinet/duduk).

A United Nations Musical Ensemble

"All in our twenties, we're instrumentalists of different backgrounds. Our natures and temperaments fuse themselves effectively in our jazz. It's the glue that holds the group together," notes Arden, w Armenian parents came to Canada from Tunisia. Arden and Vagharshak provide the Mid-East rhythms, a blend of Armenian, Egyptian and Lebanese influences. Mike injects the energy of ska/reggae counterpoints Kyle's jazz-pure input. Giovany weighs in with Cuban flavour and salsa sounds, while Andi chimes in with melodies reminiscent of the music of Greece and Albania. Together, these di shades of musical influences produce a distinct sound that could effectively be described as novel in creativity and universal in appeal.

"An individual piece could take off in several directions. It could start with an Armenian wind instrument whose sounds awake the heart to the memory of a crying child; only to become attached to a groove of African rhythm, while the piano and the clarinet add their joyous 'swing' to the mix which unifies as a creation of something new," explain Arden and Mike.

Music as saving grace

Kyle, Mike and Arden met while studying music at Vanier College. "That's all we did, listen to music on our way to the school each day. I remember a particularly atrocious rush-hour bottleneck, wit snow and everything that comes with it. All we had were some old cassettes of Greek folk music that had been forgotten and left for dead in the glove compartment. We started 'tripping' on them. But look at us today, we're open to all sorts of musical influences," Arden emphasizes. A first album on the way soon? The prospect will be discussed at a meeting with the people of the Justin Time recor Who knows? Maybe music students these days are looking forward to listening to a first CD recorded by the Arden Arapyan group, to help them endure the traffic tie-ups and the snow, sleet and slus coming winter.

Curious about the award-winning music of the Arden Arapyan Ensemble? Check out their web site at: www.myspace.com

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Meet Arden Arapyan, left, and Mike Gasselsdorfer (right), two very proud musicians, both full of smiles in celebration of their award-winning performance at the 2008 Montreal International Jazz Festival. They have also been touted as talented musical artists and composers with a great chance to become luminaries of Canadian Jazz. Photo:Pick up, Bilingue, 29 juin, p. (34) – 7