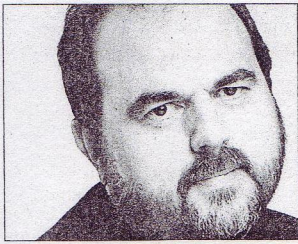


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Francophone-flavoured 'songs of heartache'

Roger Levesque



Allez Ouest poised to launch first CD, *Hybride*



SUPPLIED

Allez Ouest: "We're kind of a French Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young."

An all-star roots group inspired in part by Alberta's francophone heritage is inviting listeners to Allez Ouest. (Translation: go west.)

The band's origins date back several years to the Alberta Scene centennial promotions and the Smithsonian Folkways' celebration of Alberta culture. A circle of francophone songwriters came together for those events. Now, after a couple of personnel changes and serious musical collaborations, Allez Ouest is about to release its first CD, *Hybride*.

"We're kind of a French Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young," jokes Jason Kodie.

His accordion falls in line with three guitarists handling multiple strings, mandolin, banjo and dobro: Joel Lavoie, Mireille Moquin, and Robert Walsh. All four trade off on lead and backing vocals, mostly in French.

The CSNY comparison makes sense when you hear their vocal harmonies, but *Hybride* lives up to its name with an entertaining mix of roots sounds, blues and Cajun elements, power ballads, and the sort of typical folk lyric themes Kodie sums up as "songs of

heartache and day to day struggles."

While much of their material comes from co-writing efforts, all four have considerable experience in the performing arts. Kodie has been part of bands like Le Fuzz, Captain Tractor and Hookahman, in addition to writing for theatre. Peace River-born Lavoie is a seasoned songwriter, Moquin is a former solo songwriter and stage manager for the Edmonton Chante festival. Finally, Walsh is a veteran musician and producer whose resume includes theatre, ballet, opera and symphony collaborations. He also produced *Hybride*.

With such a diversity of backgrounds, it's too early to tell what musical direction Allez Ouest may take next.

"There's a lot of different music on this album, partly because we wanted to explore what we're capable of," says Kodie.

"Chances are it will take more of a focus the next time but we're also trying to find the right audience so it's difficult to say where things will go."

He says it can't hurt that the Edmonton and Alberta francophone population has grown considerably since 2000, but Kodie notes the band would love to tap into the Quebec music circuit or beyond

that to Europe.

Today, Allez Ouest mark the release of *Hybride* at Funky Buddha, 10341 Whyte Ave., at 5 p.m.

The album will be available from local independent retailers, online from CD Baby and iTunes.

Nightkeepers in concert

Over the years saxophonist-singer Dave Babcock has enjoyed an uncanny versatility that has allowed him to master a variety of musical projects, but he really seems to excel in funky, bluesy situations.

Enter The Nightkeepers, driven by good grooves, rhythm and blues, swing and blues, fresh arrangements of vintage material and some original tunes.

Alongside Babcock's tenor sax and vocal you'll hear ex-Rockin' Highliners guitarist Alex Herriot, drummer Sandro Dominelli, and Doug Organ's Hammond organ, serving the bass and keyboard line.

Babcock hopes to record The Nightkeepers next year — if he can make time in a busy career that includes the revival of his Jump Orchestra, a regular jazz band, and his work producing albums for Rawlco Radio's 10K-20 fund, which offers local artists \$10,000 to record their discs.

The Nightkeepers perform Sunday at 7:30 p.m. in Festival Place's cafe space.

Tickets are available from the box office 780-449-3378 or Ticketmaster.

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