



# Drumming on the moon

BY AVI LAMBERT

Shake to exotic rhythms from the jungles and oceans of the world, add a whole lot o' cheese, sit, and enjoy.

*Drumspeak* last Saturday night at St. Matthew's United Church was a head tingling performance — definitely a good thing.

Remembering it though, I'm having a hard time separating the pumped 30-plus member Samba Nova from the super-fromage rendition of Michael Jackson's "Man in the Mirror".

The event, staged to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was put on by the Nova Scotia Gambia Association.

The opening drum kit solo by musical organizer Dave James was outstanding. Sitting in the church pews and listening to him blast away was a bit surreal.

It didn't take to long to get used to the red felt benches and the sombre church organ. St. Matthew's was decorated just so — with African and South American drums, and hanging carpets — making it feel like a truly comfortable and refined place to experience music.

There was a clear duality to the evening. The drums were fantastic, but the hosts, and most of the non-drum acts, were on a different planet, possibly the moon — the cheese planet.

I understand the significance of the song selection — "One World", "Give Peace a Chance", "Let There Be Peace On Earth" —

but when Frank MacKay sang Sly and the Family's "Everyday People" backed by a nearly all-white band, something didn't swing. The fact the crowd was almost completely white as well may have had something to do with it.

After "One World" Samba Nova woke up the crowd. Feeling the huge rhythm cast file into the venue through my ears and feet was an awesome experience.

The clad-all-in-white Samba Nova act was a grand exercise in rhythmic call and answer. Mattieu Keijser, the leader of Samba Nova, sounded like a jungle mouse conducting a symphony of jungle creatures; stomping elephants, singing birds, and chirping crickets.

The next act featured Darrel Burke on the Bodhran, and he was both a comedian and musician. Along with a colourful history of the instrument, Burke got the whole crowd singing to "The Irish Washer Woman" and "Haul Away Joe". He demystified the rhythmic fears of 6/8 time with the use of 'cupatea cupatea'. Say it aloud, you'll get the idea.

The medley of aforementioned tunes came after Burke, which were, in a word — which you can probably guess by now — cheese.

Eastern Eagle, a Shubenacadie Mikmaq drum circle, followed. The primal sounds made me understand the culturally-transcendent power of rhythm and drumming. Eastern Eagle was integral in making the night's rhythms sound global and local. It was nice to see Canadian talents

drawing inspiration and tradition from Canadian roots.

Kirk Lohry and his Agudze drummers invoked the drum god Hutu by the call of their drums. Hutu, I'm sure though, was in the audience already. The five-piece drumming group filled the room with as much energy as the huge Samba Nova, with groovin' South American rhythms, and Ganza, an African rhythm and dance for male adolescence. The dancing style and drum beat got my heart racing.

Lohry's Agudze drummers and dancers were the last percussive elements of the show. What ensued next was funny — and disturbing.

Alex Mason sang Michael Jackson's "Man In The Mirror". I hope this piece was for meant for comedic purposes. Mason soulfully — in Skechers — bent to the microphone and jumped around stage. At the peak of his piece he couldn't get the microphone off the stand, so, he wrapped it around his body and gyrated some more, belting the rest of the song out. I had tears of laughter in my eyes



Headtingling celebration of human rights at *Drumspeak*.

when he performed his final flourish.

The Honourable David MacDonald was the featured speaker for the evening. Most of the time he was either patting himself on the back or losing the point. I don't remember much of what he said. Possibly I have an attention deficit, but it's disappointing the chance to say something profound about human rights was lost at *Drumspeak*.

The finale — *Les Miserables*

— was no less cheesy than the rest of the singing acts.

Perhaps it would be better if you could separate the two halves of the performance. The quality of percussion at *Drumspeak* is something I'd love to see on a regular basis. But the entertainers from the cheese planet skewed the performance a little too much.

I said it before, *Drumspeak* was like chocolate and cheese. But it seems the aftertaste I'm left with is pure fromage.

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