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Auomba City jazzes it up

The recently-formed fusion band, Auomba City, performed in Vanier's Common Room on October 20, as part of the "Lunch-time Jazz Series" organized by CHRY Radio and Vanier College. The group incorporates funk, rock, and latin styles into their music, combined with a very strong jazz element, in order to achieve their distinctive sound.

The four-member band consists of Mark Lalama on keyboards, Steve D'Angelo on guitar, drummer Mario D'Angelo, and bassist Dennis May, who formerly worked with Perfect World. Lalama, May, and Steve D'Angelo are also members of the another R&B group, Big Business, which concentrates more on a "Top 40" sound.

Excalibur's Tracy Reid spoke with Mark Lalama and Steve D'Angelo (who are both graduates of York's music department) recently about the group, which was originally formed specifically for the "Jazz Series" performance.

EXCALIBUR: What does the name, Auomba City, mean?

STEVE: It's from SCTV. They did a skit a long time ago, satirizing jazz and old detective movies from the '50s and '60s, called "Vic Arpeggio." In that skit they used the term "auomba" and it became a term that we've always used. It's a joke, but it's a very inside joke.

EXCALIBUR: Auomba City is a lot different from the other bands that are playing in Vanier for this jazz series.

MARK: What we're doing is like a funk-rock sound, but the resources are the same as jazz.

STEVE: It's more accessible. It's got a funk edge to it. It's a very electric sound.

EXCALIBUR: How did you get together as a band?

MARK: Steve, Mario and I used to play in the same band. Then Mario left the band and Dennis joined the band. This is our other band, Big Business, which is an R&B, Top 40 band. We do clubs and stuff downtown. Then a while ago I got a call from David Ackerman from CHRY. He asked me if I had a band and wanted to play in Vanier. At the time I didn't have one. He called me back a couple of weeks later and asked if I had a band yet. I told him to let me work on it and I'd get one. Then, coincidentally, Steve mentioned that he wanted to start up this fusion thing again and I mentioned Radio York. So a couple of weeks before we played here we started playing together and we got in about three or four rehearsals before we played.

EXCALIBUR: Are you going to stick together?

STEVE: Yeah, it was fun and it went okay. It went better towards the end.

MARK: The beginning was a bit shaky, shaky for us, but people seemed to get into it... The first set of the first gig with a new band is always a little uptight.

STEVE: I think most people that left, left because they had classes. That's what I hope... We got more relaxed and I actually had a good time.

STEVE: Yeah, I think we should have. I think we were a little spaced out. Ha, ha, ha. I thought we had a little too much room between us. Unlike a pop thing where it's more of a show thing, a (jazz) band is actually tighter when it's closer together. I like having the keyboards right there in front of me, and the bass right behind me. I hear it better and there's more eye contact.

EXCALIBUR: When I first heard about this lunchtime jazz series, I was expecting more mainstream jazz.

STEVE: I think people have a real misconception about jazz. What we play isn't pure jazz, obviously. It's got a lot of funk, latin music, and strong rock elements for sure. But a lot revolves around improvisation, an important thing in jazz. It's harmonically and rhythmically complex like jazz.

EXCALIBUR: But that's what makes you different.

STEVE: It's not that we're terribly original. Don't think that we've created something new. We haven't. It's called fusion. It's a mish-mash of different music. On campus that doesn't really happen very often. If you're in the music programme, you're either a classical player, or jazz—jazz meaning swing, straight 'bebop' and that's all. When I was a student here it really wasn't tolerated if you started to do 'funk' things even if it was in a jazz context.

MARK: They didn't persuade you not to do it outside of school, but as long as you were in school they strongly suggested that you do the straight-ahead jazz thing.

STEVE: Everyone in the band has a similar background. We've all played bebop but we've also been heavily exposed to pop, funk and so on, and fusion is a blend of all of them together.

EXCALIBUR: Do you play any original music?

MARK: We did a couple of Steve's original compositions. He's been writing a lot. So we'll be doing more of his original work. Writing is open to everyone though. When we first decided to do this, it was so close to the deadline, Steve said he'd get the

charts because he'd played in fusion bands before. So he dug out all these charts and we got together one day and crashed through these charts, then another day we crashed through some more charts, then another day we crashed through some more charts. Then it was like, okay, I think we've got enough! So we literally threw it together and it was up to everyone to woodshed their own parts.

EXCALIBUR: What kind of background does Dennis have?

STEVE: Dennis was a student down in California at the Bass Institute of Technology. That's a very fusiony school.

MARK: It's very geared towards performing.

EXCALIBUR: Are you looking into playing in any clubs?

STEVE: Well, yeah. There's a couple of places. There's Myer's Deli. They're pretty famous for after-hours jazz. It's a real drag 'cause it's after hours, from 1:30-3:30. I don't like playing at that time.

MARK: Their slogan is 'music for musicians.' Usually musicians go there to check out what's happening. So they get the really heavy heavyweights...

STEVE: Yeah, heavyweights playing, heavyweights listening and it's a real pressure situation. It's like "I can't break a string on this one!"

MARK: We just want enough gigs so that we can keep the momentum happening, keep the enthusiasm up.

STEVE: Right now we want to have fun and good playing. It's challenging playing. We also do a lot of jobbing gigs like weddings and stuff. We get called to freelance. All of those gigs are incredibly boring...

MARK: And incredibly well-paying.

STEVE: Exactly. So you do them; but if that's all you do, and you have this passion for playing more sophisticated music, and you are also capable of doing it but yet you're not doing it, your playing starts to deteriorate. So this is an outlet for maintaining that enthusiasm and at the same time keeping your chops up. If all you do is jobbing gigs, in a year or two you burn out and you become a jobbing player. It's my nightmare.

EXCALIBUR: Who are some of the "big names" that have influenced you?

STEVE: People like George Benson or Al Jarreau. Before they were playing pop they were playing a blend of funk, jazz and pop with a very strong jazz background. There are a number of people up there doing it quite successfully.

A R T S C A L E N D A R

GALLERIES

Contemporary Greek Art, from the collection of the Vorres Museum. AGYU (N145 Ross), Until Nov. 22.

"Twinkle, Twinkle Little Bat: The House Project, The Nursery," an exhibition of new work by sculptor Ron Sandor. Glendon Gallery (York Hall, Glendon College). Until Nov. 29.

Wayne Emery, a solo exhibition of the artist's work. IDA Gallery (102 Fine Arts Bldg.), Nov. 16-20. Also appearing at the IDA Gallery until Nov. 13 are works by artists **Daniela Wood and Janice Goldberg**.

Alan Denney, a solo exhibition of the sculptor's work. Samuel J. Zacks Gallery (109 Stong College) from Nov. 11-24.

MUSIC

Student Chamber Series Concert. Performances given by

student ensembles and soloists on Nov. 13 at 12:00 noon in the Winters Senior Common Room. All are welcome.

Lunchtime Jazz. CHRY-FM (Radio York) presents live jazz with John Pagnotta on Nov. 17 at 12:00 noon. Free admission. All welcome. Vanier Junior Common Room.

The Lawn, a CHRY-sponsored concert playing in the Grad Lounge (Ross Bldg., 7th floor) on Nov. 16 at 8:00 p.m.

Toronto Concert Orchestra Concert sponsored by Winters College. Programme includes work by Debussy, Glick, Horwood and Ravel. Soloists are Aditi Gowrisankaran on violin, Richard Stenson on Double Bass, and James McKay Conducting. Nov. 16 at 8:00 p.m. in McLaughlin Hall.

THEATRE

The York Theatre Department presents "Waiting for the Parade" and "Oh It's a Lovely War." Nov. 16-

28. Phone the box office at 736-5157 for information.

SEMINARS

The Women in Art Seminar Series presents Lisa Steele, a Toronto video artist from the Ontario College of Art on Nov. 24 from 12-1:30 p.m. in the Purple Lounge.

DANCE

The York Dance Department presents new Choreography by students and Faculty on Nov. 19 & 20 at 7:00 p.m. in the Burton Auditorium (Fine Arts Bldg.). Tickets \$3.00 for students and seniors and \$6.00 for Adults. Also a free showing of student composition will be held on Nov. 17 at 2:00 p.m. in the Burton Auditorium.

If you are planning an arts event, write a short blurb explaining what, when and where and drop it into the ARTS CALENDAR envelope at the Excalibur Office, 111 Central Square.