

ARTS & CULTURE

A Jazz Performer with a **BUBBLY** Personality



The National Jazz Awards best keyboardist and composer of the year, Laila Biali, will perform for Jazz on the Wing March 19 at the Yukon Arts Centre.

Laila Biali has been described as youthful and exuberant and youthful.

People just can't get over the fact that the National Jazz Awards' best keyboardist and composer of the year is only 25 years old.

Considering that her own favourite jazz performer was only 20 years old at the height of his career, Biali responds only with a "Really?"

As for the charge of being exuberant, she pleads guilty: "I'm always bubbling over with energy," she says over the phone from her Etobicoke apartment. "Maybe it's too much sugar."

But it was just three years ago that she received the CBC Galaxie Rising Star Prize at the National Jazz Awards and now it considers her the best.

"Gosh, well, I think one lead to the other," she says. "I was put on the map with the Rising Star Award and it created a little bit of a buzz."

Biali figures there may be an element, too, of growth when such an award is offered.

"I've heard a lot of musicians say they have hit a wall because they don't get feedback from the jazz community," she says. "But then I got an outpouring and people paid attention to my composing."

Then she gets modest again: "It's like a people's choice award and I am widely connected. "It's people skills."

It is people skills in an art form that is known for intellectual introspection.

"Jazz players are not people-oriented," Biali explains. "They concentrate so much on their craft, they have to find other people to believe in them."

"They are a certain brand of entertainer, they know how to connect with an audience."

"I'm trying to strike a balance with music that is accessible and straight ahead and really enjoyable, but I am also interested in the music that pushes the boundaries."

The Laila Biali Trio will be performing at the Yukon Arts Centre March 19 as part of the Jazz on the Wing series.

The audience can expect to hear the international debut of "certain things I have just written, hot off the press, and will be on the next CD," she says.

Biali will be accompanied by Phil Dwyer on saxophone. He has studied with Steve Grossman and has backed up Aretha Franklin, Natalie Cole, Kenny Rogers, the Temptations, Milton Berle and Bob Newhart.

He toured with Gino Vannelli's band for three months and performed on two of his recordings.

Biali says she is all the more interested in visiting the Yukon because of Scott Wilson and Debbie Peters, of Jazz Yukon: "They are two of the most efficient, effective and kind people I have ever met," she says.

"I have been so impressed with their treatment of us as a band. They really stood out from other bookers."

Tickets are available at the Hougou Centre Ticket Office and the Yukon Arts Centre Box Office.

The Sound of Recovery is Too Little of So Much

The Sound Of Recovery is the current EP release by the Whitehorse band, Friend Called Five.

At the outset I would like to state the only discernable drawback to this EP is that it is so short.

Back in the day, record companies would release singles on 45-rpm records. These singles would coincide with a Long Play release that was in circulation at the same time.

Sadly, a full-length album is not in the offing so this EP stands alone, the merest taste of what FCF is up to.

The song-writing ability of this local combo is incredible. The songs are quite sophisticated arrangements for a band that has only been together a short time.

My love of heavy music has wide-open boundaries and I will



DISCourse

with Bill Polonsky

openly admit to a flush of joy to hear the revival of guitar rock this millennium.

Where Friend Called Five makes its stand is in a newish genre called post-hardcore.

My take on the ol' "post-what-ever" chestnut is that anything described as post could be considered pre-something else. Is the glass post-full?

Yes, it has the whole screaming, growling monster voice that all heavy bands thought so very cool last decade, but truth be told I hold this phenomenon as passé.

Friend Called Five has a sound that engenders that strange sense of balance between the forces of

light and the dark side. Perhaps it has a handle on the use of "The Force". Just a thought.

I think that balance is understood by any group of musicians that are steeped in traditions of hardcore, punk, rock anthems, angst, gunplay on the evening news, dissolution of the popular paradigms, fear and loathing: all the real meaty, meaningful stuff of rock and roll.

The big hit of the EP for me is *There's A Witch After Me And You Might Get Into Trouble*. Its performance of this song in the Yukon College gym at Frostbite was one of the highlights of the evening.

The song rises and falls through



a progression of movements to a great crashing ending. Hearing it live revealed the ability of Friend Called Five to take command of the stage and wring the living breath from it.

By the end of the set the members all lay prone on the stage. I would not have been surprised to see the ghost of Jim Morrison rise with the lingering vapours of the

smoke machine. Where are the old gods when you need them?

This epic performance really shows off what these guys are about: sweaty live music at its best.

If FCF can keep the performance tight and the song writing at this level, I can only see good things in its future.

While we look forward to a full-length CD from Friend Called Five, its EP can be found at Triple J's Music Café.

Good work guys.

Check out its www.myspace.com/friendcalledfive if you want to hear two songs from *The Sound Of Recovery* now.

This CD is available at Rose Music. Steve generously provided it for review.

Visit Bill Polonsky's website at www.strangethingsdone.com.



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