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They all love the guitar

All-acoustic trio a true collaboration

By Roger Levesque, Freelance February 26, 2010

CONCERT PREVIEW

PAVLO, RIK EMMETT & OSCAR LOPEZ

Where: Arden Theatre, St. Albert

When: Tonight and Saturday at 7:30 p.m.

Tickets: \$58, Arden box office (780-459-1542) or Ticketmaster (780-451-8000)

Since the guitar has become the world's most popular musical instrument, it only follows that a trio of guitars would have an even greater appeal, right?

In practice, it's not always as easy as that simple math, but the equation seems to be working for three Canadians, Pavlo, Rik Emmett and Oscar Lopez. They temporarily set aside their successful individual careers to put a new collaboration on record, Trifecta, released a few months ago.

The all-acoustic project presents a masterful set of tracks with little or no backing, but it's thick with stylish grooves and melodies, hints of improvisation and the wide collective influences the trio shares. Fresh material highlights the group, but they may throw in a few covers on tour, including their stop in

St. Albert tonight and Saturday.

Pavlo got the idea for the trio and approached the others in 2007. "I've been a fan of both Rik and Oscar for years, so to be on this musical journey with them is just incredible. I always had it in the back of my head to try this, but it's easier said than done. You have to find the right people and when we got into the same room we knew immediately it was going to work."

Emmett was attracted to the trio for the simple element of sharing. "There's a song on the CD called Melting Pot, which pretty much describes what's going on musically. We're just throwing a bunch of styles together and having a lot of fun doing that."

Lopez signed on right away. "When Pavlo first contacted me with the idea, I said 'Let's do it.' I think it was meant to be because we have a great connection and we all love the guitar. I knew a bit about Pavlo already, but Rik turned out to have a mind-blowing musical background. For me, it's become an extension of my soul to discover different music and reinvent my career."

First they got to know each other better over a big dinner and subsequent jam sessions in the summer of 2007. Pavlo, Emmett and Lopez then regrouped later that year for a week in a house in Burlington, Ont., to write and arrange new material. Recording Trifecta involved four weeks in the studio last summer.

"It is a true collaboration," Pavlo notes. "Half the time we might not even remember who came up with what, though if you're a fan of one of us already, you will definitely hear our style."

Taking a democratic approach, the trio is credited for all tracks, though most pieces initially germinated with one player or another.

Lopez enjoys how their different temperaments have come to coexist.

"Rik and Pavlo are more schooled players than I am. I'm like a tiger in a cage. But Pavlo and I share some of the same European or Latin influences. Rik is like the balance in the trio. He can make things happen rhythm-wise by establishing the bass. It's a meeting of different cultures."

When it comes to their different backgrounds, Toronto's Emmett had the most typical upbringing for a Canadian kid, with his early interest in the Beatles and rock 'n' roll generally. He is still best known for playing guitar in the hit rock band Triumph from 1975 to '88. His solo projects have focused on blues, swing jazz, fusion and smooth jazz, and other collaborations.

Pavlo was also born in Toronto, but his Greek ancestry played a huge role in shaping a set of musical influences he often sums up as Mediterranean. He's had great luck with a string of successful, self-produced albums.

Chilean-born Lopez has chiselled out his own share of notoriety since he came to Canada in 1979. You can find him on a successful series of Latin-themed solo and group recordings that highlight his guitar, in the songwriter collaboration with James Keelaghan known as Compadres, or possibly performing with a symphony orchestra.