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Guitargods

Pavlo, Emmett and Lopez bring together divergent personalities and styles as guitar trio

By Heath McCoy, Calgary Herald February 27, 2010

Preview

Pavlo, Rik Emmett and Oscar Lopez perform Sunday at Jack Singer Concert Hall. For tickets phone 403-294-9494 or go online at epcorcentre.org.

The business man, the professor and the wild card.

That's how the publicist for Pavlo, Rik Emmett and Oscar Lopez describes the dashing, recently formed acoustic guitar trio as they clown around, posing for pictures in the posh lounge of Calgary's Fairmont Palliser.

Sitting down to the interview over a bottle of red wine, it quickly becomes apparent that she's dead on.

Listening to the group's debut CD, *Trifecta*, and laying out each man's impressive resume, it's clear that the trio's upcoming

show, Sunday at Jack Singer Concert Hall, is set to be a guitar lover's dream.

Featuring the romantic Mediterranean stylings of Greek-Canadian Pavlo Simtikidis, the jazz fusion of

Emmett, famous as the frontman for hard rockers Triumph, and the fiery Latin sounds of Chilean-born Calgarian Lopez, the trio is sure to serve up a musical feast.

But if their live dynamic is anything like the personal dynamic these three brought to the table at the Palliser, folks are in for a charming and humorous show as well.

Central to the band's chemistry is the amusing and very real tension that exists between Emmett, the professor, and Lopez -- you guessed it -- the wild one.

"I'm a very different guy than Oscar," explains Emmett, who racked up several gold and platinum records in the '70s and '80s with Toronto's Triumph.

"Oscar is all gut and ass. He goes by his gut and he flies by the seat of his pants. Me, I'm very WASP. 'Hang on now. I'd better write this all down and think about it.' "

That temperamental difference manifested itself immediately when Pavlo put together the group, inspired by another guitar trio that he loved, Al Di Meola, John McLaughlin and Paco de Lucia, who won acclaim together for their seductive flamenco-jazz in the '80s.

"There's a lot of wonderful musicians in this world, but to do something like this successfully, there has to be a natural chemistry," says Pavlo. "That's something you can't create, manufacture or predict. It's there, or it's not."

A fan of Lopez's Juno Award-winning work, Pavlo approached the Calgary-based guitarist with the idea first.

"Right away I went, 'Let's do it, baby!' " says Lopez excitedly. "Sometimes in life you get this sense . . . and you don't have to think twice. All my life, I go for it. What have I got to lose?"

Looking for that elusive third element to complete his vision, Pavlo then extended an invite to Emmett, who today teaches songwriting and music business at Toronto's Humber College.

Emmett hesitated. "I don't jump in. I wait to see what the spirit is," Emmett says.

"I've been involved with enough projects to think 'Let's take baby-steps here so we give this thing a chance to organically grow and breathe. If you bring too many expectations to the table . . . when stuff begins to go wrong, you can't get it fixed.

"As soon as I figured it out that everybody was willing to take their egos and leave them outside the door, and that this would be about nothing more than good songwriting and good guitar playing, that was the big thing for me. . . . This has to be about each guy trying to find his own strength inside the brotherhood."

Then again, with brothers who are as polar opposite as Emmett and Lopez, there was bound to be creative friction.

A technical stickler who has written columns for Guitar Player magazine, Emmett readily describes himself as "fastidious," adding: "I have to make sure it's exactly right. It's like (I've) got a square shoved right up (my) back. . . .

"But (Oscar), he's not an academic type player at all. . . . He can do seven takes (of a song) and none will be the same." Emmett adds, jokingly: "I think he took guitar lessons from Phoebe on Friends."

At this, Lopez responds with mock rage, motioning towards the former hard rocker as if he's brandishing a knife. "Are you putting me down!? What is the matter with you?"

Laughter breaks out around the table and Emmett continues.

"Here was this guy that had this incredible power and energy, but how do you harness it? . . . With him, it's like liquid mercury. You can't even grab it.

"Finally, Pavlo said, 'Rik, you've just got to open the cage and let the tiger out.' And then I knew how I would cope with him, how I would deal with Oscar. And after that I never had a problem. But it took me awhile to get to that point."

It's that friction that makes the trio special, according to Pavlo.

"We are three very different guitar players and three very different personalities and that's why it works," says the Greek stylist. "If we were all the same, it would be bland."

As of this interview, the trio was working to bring that same diversity to their live show. As well as playing songs from Trifecta, the group was planning to touch on the storied careers of all three men.

That is to include a spicy acoustic version of the old Triumph headbanger Lay It On The Line. A medley of Beatles tunes and a B.B. King blues song were also being perfected.

Touring together was something that all three guitarists were looking forward to.

"The master plan . . . is to go step by step and live through this and see where it takes us," says Emmett, cautiously.

Of course, his new found foil Lopez steps up to kick that caution to the wind.

"When I get out there, I'm going to explode," says Lopez. "I cannot wait to go!"

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