

Kalabash Heats Up Molson Stage

By Sarah B. Hood
Contributing Writer

A recent concert by Kalabash as part of the du Maurier Ltd. Downtown Jazz festival had spectators at Harbourfront Centre's Molson Stage on their feet, clapping and dancing in wild enthusiasm.

The program combined mellow jazz-inspired calypso stylings with the virtuosity of Trinidadian jazz pianist Darren Sheppard, a resident of Toronto since 1991. The other members of Kalabash are Anthony Pierre -- percussion and steel drums; Demo Cates -- saxophone; Wilson Laurencin -- drums; Orin (Funky O) Isaacs -- electric bass, and David (D-Zone) Williams -- keyboard.

For many in the crowd this was their first exposure to pan jazz. "I've never heard anything like this," commented one happy listener as potent jazz-calypso fusion washed over the sun-soaked crowd at the picturesque open-air venue.

The show opened, appropriately, with the Gershwin favourite *Summertime*, followed by *Island Girlie* by McCoy Tyner. The more laid-back *Heart of a Woman* by Bobby Lyle was next, graced by a sobbing saxophone solo and a mellow pan and reed interlude.

Southbound Traveler opened with a compelling mix of talking drums, bongos and congas, and moved on with shimmering chimes and a sparkling blend of sax and pan. In Andy Merritt's *Out of the Blue* -- well known from the film *The*

Firm -- bass and pan mirrored each other in different octaves, and the ensemble brought in a hard-driving finish that had the audience roused to explosive excitement.

With *Fragile*, by Gordon Sumner (better known to rock fans as "Sting"), the tone mellowed and the tempo slowed, with the saxophone's throaty voice coming to the fore. A musical segue allowed for band introductions, then Kalabash galloped right into *Chip Down*, a hilarious novelty piece driven by an infectious, humourous bass line. As the crowd started clapping along, an intentionally discordant battle of pan and piano referred to a range of well-known compositions including *Mary Had A Little Lamb*. The drum solo was so wild that Williams actually left the piano to "cool off" the overheating Laurencin.

A standing ovation followed, and the crowd refused to let the band go without an encore: Sonny Rollins' classic *St. Thomas*, arranged by Ralph Robertson, which was received to even greater applause.

Toronto jazz fans won't soon forget the name of Kalabash, or their introduction to pan jazz!



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