



Halifax jazz ensemble Gypsophilia — front row from left: Adam Fine, Ross Burns, Matt Myer and Nick Wilkinson, and rear, from left: Sageev Oore, Gina Burgess and Alec Frith — launches its new CD Sa-Ba-Da-OW! at FRED on Friday and Saturday nights before heading out on the road to do 15 festival shows.

Band of Gypsies

CD launch kicks off first cross-Canada tour for Halifax jazz ensemble

By **STEPHEN COOKE**
Entertainment Reporter

ALTHOUGH they look relaxed and chipper on the outside, chatting over coffee and biscotti at the west end cafe Local Jo's, on the inside Gypsophilia members Adam Fine and Ross Burns are wound up tighter than the latter's guitar strings with excitement over the jazz septet's first cross-Canada tour this summer.

"It's a gigantic deal," says bassist and former Atlantic Jazz Festival artistic director Fine, who maps out a trip to nearly every major summer jazz event in the country following this week's launch of the sophomore CD Sa-Ba-Da-OW! at FRED, corner of North and Agricola streets, on Friday and Saturday nights.

Starting next week, Halifax's modern Euro-jazz ensemble will be playing every day for 10 days straight, heading all the way west before coming back home for an Atlantic Jazz Festival show at the Seahorse Tavern on July 15.

"Based on the size of the country, and the size of the band, it should be impossible," says Burns. "But it worked out perfectly, with a big assist from the Canada Council.

"It's 15 festival shows in total, from Vancouver to St. John's, and wrapping up in Gros Morne, which will go down as one of the coolest places we've ever played—right up there with the club car on the VIA Rail train and the wooden cathedral in Indian River, P.E.I."

Late last summer, Gypsophilia used the comforts of VIA Rail to play a series of dates between Montreal and Toronto on its first major venture outside the Maritimes, and this year the band sees the festival tour as a unique way to reach a core audience that's logical and strategic.

Plus it'll be a lot more fun than the traditional method of hopping in a van and heading west, hoping for the best.

"It's an inroad into these places, and playing big shows, as opposed to going to Saskatoon, paying someone to put some

posters up in advance, and then playing to 15 people," explains Burns.

"Instead we're on a festival stage, we've got a built-in audience, and a chance to be seen and received by some people. It's a great way to go somewhere once, and then the next time we go there we can do something on our own, but it feels like a once-in-a-lifetime chance to do an expansive coast-to-coast thing."

Last year's road tripping also led directly into the November recording of Sa-Ba-Da-OW! at Echo Chamber Audio in Halifax, a live-off-the-floor affair bursting with life in each contribution from Fine, Burns, trumpeter Matt Myer, violinist Gina Burgess, keyboardist Sageev Oore, and guitarists Alec Frith and Nick Wilkinson.

The band swings harder, the solos have more daredevil flair, and there are more musical flavours to be found than before.

"The timing was perfect for us to make

See **JAZZ** / E2

Jazz

continued from / E1

a record; we were probably the tightest we've ever been, and more confident about coming up with funny ideas," grins Fine.

"We definitely made use of the chops we honed on those trips," adds Burns. "There were times when ideas or arrangements would just happen organically, or it would seem easier to take the genesis of a melody and turn it into an original-sounding song."

Taking its title from an onomatopoeic scat phrase that is both an exclamation of energetic freedom as well as the kind of language Gypsophilia's members use to describe parts of songs in rehearsal, Sa-Ba-Da-OW! sees the group moving to a whole new level. There are now six different composers (twice as many as on the debut CD *Minor Hope*), and the Hot Club of France cafe jazz sound that was the hallmark of the group's style at its onset five years ago has become skilfully blended into a collage that includes Jewish folk music, tango, and modern jazz composition.

"I don't think we really realized until we got in the studio how varied it was going to be, and how wide-ranging the sounds are," says Fine.

"When we were actually sitting down and doing takes back to back, it felt like a bit of a world tour," adds Burns. "Here's that Mexican tune, now let's play some klezmer; here's something with a Latin feel, this has a reggae thing going on."

"I think we all prefer making a record that's more diverse front to back, rather than 12 songs that all have the same tempo and the same feel."

The variety and skill displayed on Sa-Ba-Da-OW! is ample evidence of Gypsophilia's ever-expanding universe, making this the perfect time for the band to build on its current level of confidence and sheer entertainment value, never losing sight of the sense of joy and fun it brings to every part of each song.

"I'm really proud of the fact we have this identity; there's a core essence to what we do, but we still get to do all these other things on top of it," says Burns. "Rather than making that gypsy jazz thing feel like shackles, it's more like a springboard to new things."

"I remember earlier on, when we realized we could get away with stuff at shows, sneaking songs into our sets that were different from what people were used to hearing, and going, 'Oh, OK, that works,'" says Fine, stroking his chin.

"And since people didn't react funny to those ideas, we could bring in a little more weirdness or influences from further off the beaten track."

"And before you know it, we're doing Boyz II Men covers," laughs Burns.

For a sample of Gypsophilia's latest — although sadly, no Boyz II Men — or tickets to the shows at FRED, visit www.gypsophilia.org.

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