

## Playing both sides of the street

**ON THE ROAD / Montreal's Charles Papasoff kicks off the Canadian jazz festival season with a tour that bridges musical and cultural gaps.**

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IT'S lunch time at De Ville, a comfortably hip bistro on St. Lawrence Boulevard, the street that historically has separated the English from the French in Montreal. De Ville, which has a narrow terrace with room enough for only a single row of small, round tables serviced by a slim waitress, is on the east side of the street. Not very long ago, that would have meant the French side. But nothing in this city is quite so simple any more.

Take, for example, that waitress. She's an anglophone — no doubt about it. And take, for another example, one of her customers on this sunny spring afternoon, jazz musician Charles Papasoff, one of the Canadian scene's true originals. The explosive baritone saxophonist was born 40 years ago in Montreal of Bulgarian stock and now divides his time between Quebec and the west of France. "I speak both languages fluently and sometimes without an accent," he explained very convincingly in English. "But my upbringing was French, so I have a Latin soul in that respect. I like to play music with energy. I like it to swing very hard. When it hurts, I want it to hurt bad. When it's soft, it

has got to be nice and . . ." His voice trailed off, lost to the sounds on the street.

The Papasoff Trio, a rough-and-ready unit with bassist George Mitchell and drummer Martin Auguste, is one of several Montreal bands touring Canada during the jazz-festival season just now getting under way. The city is particularly well represented on the circuit this year, between Papasoff, pianist Jean Beauchet's trio, bassist Sylvain Gagnon's quartet, the *musique actuelle* trio Il Bizarre and the eight-piece Swing Dynamique with legendary drummer Guy Nadon.

"It's an exciting time for Montreal," Papasoff observed, speaking in general terms. "We've almost come to terms with the linguistic thing — well, maybe — and we're reaping the benefits. Because the linguistic thing does have its up side; it creates two cultures, and there's a lot of movement in between."

Please see Papasoff D2

## Papasoff releases new CD

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And you get a sax player like Kelly Jefferson, who's English, and the French want to play with him. The music will prevail."

Papasoff himself, sweetly gregarious fellow that he is, has always worked both sides of the street, so to speak. And down all the alleys: He is no more limited by musical style than he is by language. His credits in recent years range from an informal association with a heavy-metal band, The Thrill of It All (known now as Spackle), to a collaboration with Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal on the production of *Tristan Seul!* that was seen at last summer's Festival International de Jazz de Montréal.

Virtually all of Papasoff's ventures revolve around the baritone saxophone, although he has also been known to play soprano saxophone, flute and bass clarinet in jazz settings, and can handle guitar and keyboards as his studio projects — film scores mostly — require.

For all its bluster, the baritone has had a rather modest place in jazz history, usually in a functional rather than featured role. Its acknowledged masters have been few: Harry Carney with the Duke Ellington Orchestra, Leo Parker, Serge Chaloff, Gerry Mulligan and Pepper Adams in the bop era, John Surman and Hamiet Bluiett in more recent times, and not many more. Papasoff, surely, is one, albeit as yet unrecognized, as such outside Quebec and parts of Europe.

"It's a great instrument that hasn't really been exploited to its maximum potential by the players who've lived before us," he suggested, having certainly done his own bit for the cause.

In the meantime, Papasoff shows the world what he can do on his new trio CD, *Painless* (Nisapa Productions), released just in time to cap- 4).

Not only has he pushed the instrument to the very limits of its range, both high notes and low, with tremendous assurance, he is the driving force behind the rip-roaring International Baritone Conspiracy, which comprises two Canadians (Jean Demone and David Mott), two Europeans (Christian Gavillet and Bo Van Der Werf) and an American (the aforementioned Hamiet Bluiett). The ensemble has performed in concert only once, at the *musique actuelle* festival in Victoriaville, Que., in 1995, but has a terrific CD, *International Baritone Conspiracy* (Victo) to show for the occasion.

"It warrants another record," he insisted. "The music warrants that we get another crack at it, to see how far we can take it this time." Still, in Papasoff's estimation, it will be up to the next generation, and the one after, to break the baritone's place in jazz wide open. And to hear him talk, it won't be an easy task. "A guy coming up now who listens to John Surman — or to Charles Papasoff — has to be able to play four octaves at least. If he listens to Gerry Mulligan, he has to be able to play round, and sweet, and within the chord changes. If he listens to Hamiet Bluiett, he has to have a rocking bottom end, man, rocking. Take all of those things, and a kid who's just starting — he has his work cut out for him. But it's there. It has been done. It can be done, so he'll do it, and he's going to stretch from there and show us what to do."

In the meantime, Papasoff shows the world what he can do on his new trio CD, *Painless* (Nisapa Productions), released just in time to cap-

talize on the Canadian festivals and the short tour of Italy that will follow in mid-July. The trio's music, which is coarse, bullish and angular, might be called "free-bop" for its mix of older and newer traditions. But what, then, to make of its funk influences? Or of the asymmetrical rhythms that echo Papasoff's Bulgarian heritage?

In truth, Papasoff can no more easily be categorized than the French and English of Montreal can be divided by a single downtown street. He evokes the memory of the late Pepper Adams, with whom he studied briefly in New York before the American's death in 1986. "Pepper never described himself as a bebop player. His thing was always 'Make your voice, do your own thing. You've got to sound the way you sound.' He had his own sound on baritone sax, and even though he did play a lot of bebop, he had his own way of doing it. But he didn't describe himself as a player of that school."

"It took me a while to understand why, but it was exactly because he had his own voice. And that's what has stayed with me: You've got to sound the way you sound, because at the end of the line, if you don't, you sound like somebody else."

Charles Papasoff's Canadian jazz festival tour begins today in Winnipeg (Sunday), Calgary (Monday), Vancouver (Tuesday and Wednesday), Victoria (Thursday), Toronto (June 28), Quebec City (29) and Montreal (July 3). The Papasoff Trio will also accompany Montreal singer Karen Young in Toronto (June 27) and Montreal (July 4).