

Guitar virtuoso goes the extra string



ERROL
NAZARETH

Rhythms N' Rhymes

For two weeks in the mid-'80s, guitarist Andre Roy found himself without a roof over his head.

All he had was the clothes on his back, five dollars, and a rare vintage 1969 Gibson Super 400 guitar which he'd owned since 1978. (Look for this guitar online and you'll come across stores asking \$15,000 for it.)

Fortunately for us, Roy's spell in the valley didn't discourage the Montreal transplant from developing an original and exciting sound that's creating a buzz in the city's jazz scene.

Bassist George Koller, who's played with artists like Peter Gabriel, Loreena McKennitt and Bruce Cockburn, produced Roy's latest disc, *DarkBright*. Ace drummer Vito Rezzo rounds out the excellent trio.

Koller's spot-on appraisal of the guitarist's superb playing should inspire axe fiends to swing by Hugh's Room on Monday to hear this original.

"By using super-thin, low-action strings that allow for great speed, he can reach all kinds of chord stretches — dissonant and consonant — and can bend them very easily for sitar-like mobility," the bassist tells me. "He's also explored the whole guitar and knows where unusual chords exist and how to approach them."

Koller, who's played with Roy for about seven years, says he "rarely plays the same thing twice," and that his spontaneity surprises and rewards listeners.

Here's further proof that Roy is in a league of his own: he plays his guitar through a Leslie tone cabinet which is primarily used by Hammond B-3 organists so that he can get a variety of whirling or tremolo-type sounds.

Koller says Roy has studied and learned from the great guitarists of our time, yet he's managed to stay true to his own voice and that's reflected in his unique sound, compositions, and improvisational style.

When Roy was studying at the prestigious Berklee College of Music, one of his instructors noticed his flair for originality and introduced him to the seven-string guitar.

He's been playing it for over 20 years. "There are a few jazz players in every major city who play the seven-string guitar," Roy tells me. "My seven-string is a 1968 Gretsch George Van Eps model. This guitar is very rare, it was made by the company for only 10 years and they

sold very few. I flew to Dallas in 1987 to buy it. Adding more strings to the guitar is not new but it isn't for everyone as it requires a different technique."

Roy says he shelved his trusted seven-string when it came time to record *DarkBright* since the guitar has "an extra-low string for bass tuned to A."

Having one of the best bassists in the city on his team meant Roy didn't require the special axe.

For his part, Koller says it's "thrilling to perform with Roy because he has a great sense-of-the-now moment. He allows room for anything to happen on stage or

any musical inspiration to unfold in the true jazz tradition."

NOTE: *The Andre Roy Trio celebrates the release of DarkBright at Hugh's Room Monday. Soulful singer-songwriter-guitarist Emily Raquel opens.*

The show starts at 8:30 p.m. Admission is \$18.

Hugh's Room is at 2261 Dundas St. W. 416-531-6604

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Not much Jekyll, plenty of Hyde

JOHN COULBOURN
Special to the Toronto Sun

Judging from his Broadway-bound production of *Jekyll & Hyde: The Musical*, it's a good thing director/choreographer Jeff Calhoun chose a career in theatre and not the amusement park.

Had he chosen to make rollercoasters instead of stage musicals, one suspects, his rides would begin at the very peak of the steepest drop and simply not go anywhere from there.

Which is pretty much precisely what his production of the freewheeling, bodice-ripping Leslie Bricusse/Frank Wildhorn "adaptation" of Robert Louis Stevenson's novel seems to do in its limited but tightly-wound engagement at the Ed Mirvish Theatre, where it opened Wednesday.

That would, of course, be the same adaptation that Robin Phillips directed on Broadway back in the mid-'90s — a production that, while it ran for years, failed nonetheless to make it into the fiscal black.

But while it can never be counted a financial triumph, the Phillips' production, if happy memory serves, tried mightily to and often succeeded in exploring both the emotional light and darkness of the tale as spun out in Bricusse's hyper gothic book. In the process, Phillips also provided a dramatically textured voyage into the heart of the story that did much to minimize the shortcomings of Wildhorn's overly anthemic music and Bricusse's elementary rhyming schemes, which hit the very apogee of good taste in the pairing of "upper class" with "his ass".

Instead of minimizing the faults of the book and music,

however, Calhoun's production embraces them, turning pretty much the entire song-list into a score sung in the key of overwrought, with *American Idol*'s Constantine Maroulis struggling to find dramatic depth in the dual roles of the good doctor and his villainous alter-ego, but finding only (Johnny) Depp-lite instead.

Deborah Cox, meanwhile plays the tragically fallen Lucy Harris, her character's tragedy lessened in no small way by the fact that Cox seems to think she's starring in a steamy music video.

Meanwhile, as Emma Carew, virtuous foil to Cox's Bring-On-The-Men Lucy, Teal Wicks opts for more stainless 'n' steel than sugar 'n' spice, although she still manages to offer up the most tender moments in the show in a surprisingly under-stated *Once Upon a Dream*.

But, in the end, it falls to Richard White, cast as Emma's loving father, and Cox's fellow Canuck, Laird Macintosh, cast as Jekyll's friend, John Uttersson, to periodically coax the production off the clenched-hair cliff on which it is so often perched, affording in the process, moments of genuine true human emotion — but only moments.

And while Tobin Ost's sets and costume designs are suitably goth, if not always strictly Gothic, they do in fact sit well with Calhoun's high-test vision, as does Jeff Croiter's lighting — but sadly, rampant over-amplification in Ken Travis' sound design leaves Maroulis' Mr. Hyde panting like an over-eager Pekingese in too many of his scenes.

If you're looking for dramatic texture, all this production offers is a game of Hyde and seek.



Andre Roy plays
Hugh's Room
Monday

**JEKYLL & HYDE:
THE MUSICAL**

★ ★ ★

Ed Mirvish Theatre