

Young Sean Meredith-Jones crosses the guitar genres

Jazz

GEOFF CHAPMAN
MUSIC CRITIC

Guitarist Sean Meredith-Jones grew up with rock, but now he's graduated to jazz — and on the evidence of his debut CD, *New Time*, he's already very comfortable in many jazz genres.

He's been playing guitar for 17 years, taking private lessons since the age of 9. A four-year stay at Boston's prestigious Berklee College of Music, where he majored in performance and was at close quarters with jazz greats, pointed him toward jazz.

Since returning to Toronto he's been on the club circuit, has performed at the Downtown Jazz Festival, teaches, indulges his love for composition and has taken lessons from leading local axeman Lorne Lofsky.

You can hear Meredith-Jones tomorrow at the Oakville jazz-fest on the Revolution Music Stage at 7:30, fronting a quartet (with pianist Robby Botos, bass Marc Rogers and drummer Mark Kelso). If you miss him there, he's doing a night at the Montréal Bistro on Tuesday with bass Michael Pellarin, Botos and Kelso.

In an interview he noted that his usual bandmates, drummer Ben Riley and keyboardist Michael Janzen, were not available for these gigs. Riley, "with whom I've played different musics since high school," is touring with Bruce Cockburn.

"I've spent time with rock. I loved the way Eddie Van Halen's guitar sounded and the energy he conveyed. I love country music, too, but when we first started recording I felt I was showing my strengths as a (jazz) composer. I felt I had strong songs."

There are 10 originals with free-flowing ideas that tell a story on the new disc.

The tunes are substantial, exploring different modes and demonstrating that he's a performer who deserves serious notice. At live shows the band also does jazz standards.

"I'm just starting my journey



Guitarist Sean Meredith-Jones headlines at Oakville Jazz festival.

as a composer," says Meredith-Jones. "Wheels turn slowly in music and I'm just taking baby steps. I like teaching but there's a need for balance; if you teach you have also to be an active player. Teaching helps since it ensures you keep up with fundamentals."

He describes his composing as if looking from a sculptor's viewpoint, starting with a block of material and then slowly picking away at it until the end result is a beautiful work of art. Raw ideas can always be tweaked, edited and moulded, he notes.

"If I've ever come up with something cool harmonically, I would never let it out of the barn if the music lover inside me doesn't dig it. If a song is not delivered well, it doesn't matter how well it was written."

His ultimate aim is "to do what I'm doing at a higher level and to write for other players," and he'll certainly help his cause because he's a quintuple threat as writer, arranger, performer, producer and recording engineer.

"At first I was afraid of all the technical stuff since it meant a lot bigger load. But as I got into it I felt more comfortable. Now I can record in my own environment rather than a regular stu-

dio." He can do that since he now owns a 24-track digital recording studio.