

Former Edmonton musicians back in town

Swedish singer Johanna Sillanpaa, jazz guitarist Jim Head both have music roots here

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I am often reminded of how many excellent musicians come out of this city, especially when two separate artists come back to visit the same weekend.

Since 2002, the Calgary-based project known as Sillan & Young has been bringing a unique mix of pop, folk and jazz elements to audiences, first as a duo and then as a full quartet.

They return to the duo format for three nights of tunes at Four Rooms City Centre tonight through Saturday (9 nightly).

Singer Johanna Sillanpaa is originally from Sweden, but it was here in Edmonton that she got a key part of her musical training at Grant MacEwan in the mid-1990s. Then, after moving to Calgary in 1998, she got another important creative boost by meeting up with guitarist Aaron Young.

Their musical chemistry was pretty instantaneous, leading to a self-titled debut album of original material nearly two years ago. Now they're finishing a followup disc that should be out by summer. Meanwhile, Sillanpaa is just about to release her own solo album in a more deliberate jazzy R&B vein.

She calls the Sillan & Young style "urban roots," and that fits as well as anything in describing their original material which starts with Young's composing and Sillanpaa's lyrics (bassist Kodi Hutchinson and drummer Tyler Hornby fill out the group's quartet format). When they try on the occasional cover, you might hear something by Jimi



Jazz guitarist Jim Head will play a mix of original tunes and favourite covers at the Yardbird Suite on Friday.

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and ready to try out some of his new original music.

"In a strange way I feel as if I have rediscovered the guitar," Head reports. He says he used to be influenced more by other player/composers and less by guitarists.

Now he's focused on plumbing the guitar for its own sake, and that change has fostered new strengths in both his technique and writing. Head also has an album in the can he's currently working to release.

Clearly, the guitarist has had a fruitful four years away, with some unexpected new inspirations along the way. First there was his examination of 20th-century classical composers and their connections to jazz during his time at McGill; then, more recently, during his stay in New York, Head wound up studying with the world-renowned jazz guitarist John Abercrombie.

"More than any specifics of technique, it was really great to find out that guys like Abercrombie encounter some of the same problems and challenges that I have, and it confirmed my feelings about the directions I'm moving in," he says.

Upcoming jazz

The Tuxedo Junkies play their vintage Vegas-styled jazz at Jeffrey's Cafe and Wine Bar tonight only, while singer Christina Schmolke brings her pop-jazz sound to the same room Saturday (\$7 cover both nights).

If you catch one jazz singer this year, consider a date with Chicago vocalist Kurt Elling. The Blue Note label star brings his superb trio to the Citadel Feb. 3 (call the Citadel box office at 425-1820).

Hendrix, Tuck & Patty, Tracy Chapman or Madeline Peyroux, but it's Sillanpaa's elastic vocal and Young's impressive guitar work that brings it all to life.

He got his musical apprenticeship over five years of touring with the group Barrage, but that fiddle-heavy band didn't allow for much individual expression.

A Head in jazz

When the Yardbird Suite reopens from its holiday break this weekend, the club will feature a date with Edmonton ex-patriot, jazz guitarist Jim Head, who's back for a trio get-together with old

friends, bassist Mike Lent and drummer Sandro Dominelli (Friday at 9 p.m.; tickets are \$8 for EJS members, \$12 for guests, available in advance from Ticketmaster or at the door). They intend to field a mix of both original tunes and favourite covers.

Head originally left town to take a master's degree at Montreal's McGill University back in 2002. Between meeting the challenges of that program, new experiences with the many players of the Montreal jazz scene, and a recent three-month sojourn studying in New York on a Canada Council grant, he's creatively recharged