

The story of Kleztory

by Sydney Smith

The group Kleztory has something very unique going for them. The band, formed earlier this year, consists of five people who are literally professional musicians. With music degrees ranging from Université de Montreal to McGill to the Nizhnekamsk School of Music in Russia, the band plays in a tight, charismatic manner that makes their professionalism shine. The most interesting part is the music they play—Eastern European Jewish music, better known as Klezmer music.

Paradoxically traditional and dynamic, Kleztory's members are Elvira Misbakhova on the violin, Henri Oppenheim on accordion, guitar by Alain Legault, Mark Peetsma on double-bass and Airat Ichmouratov on the clarinet. The unusual mix of instruments makes for an interesting product.

Considering they are playing tragic music from the turn of the eighteenth century, they know how to make it fun. Their songs are not only fresh and different, but the lack of lyrics makes the listener focus solely on the music being presented.

For those who have never heard Kleztory, or even klezmer music, a more contemporary example to compare them to would be the music from the soundtrack to the French box-office hit, *Amélie*. The band shares a diverse background ranging from Russia to Quebec, and stretching as far across the country as Alberta.

According to accordionist Oppenheim, originally from France, the band is happy to be playing in and around Montreal for now. The band has just released a short album and they're planning for a full-length album next fall. "The beauty of the

music is that you can take it to so many different places, even though it is traditional," said Oppenheim. Through rejuvenating this ancient music, they are opening it up to a whole new audience.

The diverse crowd present at their Nov. 13 show at La Sala Rosa testified to the unique nature of their creation. They were not only catering to those familiar with Klezmer music, but showing it to a whole new group of music fans. The songs were a mix of upbeat, fast-paced music that you couldn't help but dance to, and a tragic, chamber-esque sounding drone that made you feel as if you were a peasant on the streets of Russia at the turn of the 1800s.

Although the band only formed this year, they are not shy on music experience. The guitarist has played a wide range of music from Montreal's Jazz Festival to that of the more lively swing variety. The bassist is a former member of the art-rock ensemble Corpuse, and an expert on bluegrass music. The violinist used to be a part of a chamber orchestra, La Prima Vera, and brings her Russian expertise to the Montreal group. The clarinetist brings even more Eastern European heritage to the group and was once a part of the Kazan Symphony Orchestra. All of these musicians play their instruments well—the bass is solid, the accordion is enchanting, the violin and guitar sections are very complicated, yet delightful.

If you've never heard klezmer music before, or even if you have, Kleztory is worth seeing in concert. Their sound is a nice change from the ordinary, especially live.

Kleztory plays in and around Montreal frequently. For show listings check out www.kleztory.com.