

Written by Richard Amery

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Montreal jazz musician Elizabeth Shepherd and Toronto based guitarist Michael Occhipinti are excited to break in the Geomatic Attic's temporary new downtown space, Nov. 4 with music from their new CD "The Weight of Hope."

The duo, dubbed ES:MO will be joined by drummer Trail, B.C. based drummer Tony Ferraro.

Occhipinti and Shepherd have a long history of performing and recording together dating back to 2010, when Occhipinti was working on an album of John Lennon songs.



"I was working with a lot of different artists and wanted Elizabeth to be involved," he said adding they have been working on each other's albums and support each other on tours ever since.

"He's the best and we can cover a lot of ground," Shepherd said, noting Occhipinti's versatility means they can play in a variety of different configuration including the duo, the trio for the Lethbridge show and sometimes a quintet.

They can play an equally diverse styles of music spanning from straight ahead jazz to R and B and pop.

“ES:MO is a collaboration,” she said.

They started working on their latest album at the Banff Centre for the Arts in 2019.

Wee thought we’d go to Banff Centre for inspiration to work on the album,” Occhipinti said.

“It was supposed to be released last year, but it wasn’t because of the pandemic, so we had some more time with the songs,” he said during the lockdown.

Occhipinti, was working in his Toronto studio and started exchanging files with Shepherd in her studio in the mountains by Montreal.

“I was experimenting with guitar sounds, and I would send them to her to see what she thought of them,” he said.

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“ We’re really excited about the album. We benefitted from the patience it took. We were able to work on the best parts of these songs and ourselves” he said, adding five of the songs on the album are from the original Banff sessions.

ES:MO released the first single “Any Other Way” off of the new album, which was released Friday, Oct 29.

The single is a cover of a Stax artist William Bell song, which Toronto music scene icon and transgendered artist pioneer Jackie Shane turned into a minor hit.

“ We felt compelled to let the songs breathe,” Shepherd said.

Occhipinti was glad they decided to cover “ Any Other Way”

He noted renown ethnomusicologist and producer Rob Bowman wrote about the song and Jackie Shane, which piqued Occhipinti’s interest so he pitched the idea to Shepherd to produce it.

“Jackie Shane was a transgender artist and an important part of the Yonge Street music scene in the 1980s,” he said.

“Ours is more of an R and B performance,” Shepherd said.

She noted the trio will likely be playing most of the album, but will read the audience to see what they want to hear.

“We’re pretty good at reading the crowd. We just like to see what happens,” Occhipinti said.

“Every show is different and fresh. We can play jazz, R and B and soul. We don’t want to play one thing,” he continued.

“Jazz is just one of the possibilities.”

Occhipinti is excited to play with Shepherd.

“We’ve been playing together for 10 years. It feels natural,” he said.

Shepherd is excited to return to where she grew up.

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“I actually have a Lethbridge connection. I lived in Lethbridge from age four to six. I actually went to Agnes Davidson school,” she enthused, adding she played the Geomatic Attic pre pandemic in 2019.

“Lethbridge is beautiful, it always feels like home when I play here and the Geomatic Attic is a perfect venue,” she said.

“The record is out on Oct. 29. We can’t wait to play it for an audience,” she continued, adding she is always excited to play with Occhipinti.

“Michael is the one of the best people I’ve played with,” she said.

The Downtown venue, (427 – 5 Street South) next to Bread Milk & Honey is a new but temporary venue which won’t replace the Geomatic Attic space we’ve used for the last 13 1/2 years but is intended to be an enhancement to Downtown LA as well as give more exposure to the Geomatic Attic

ES:MO plays the Geomatic Attic's new downtown space, Nov.. 4 at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$45.

— *By Richard Amery, L.A.Beat Editor*