

Bunnett and Maqueque to play Maynooth on July 11 and 12



By Nate Smelle

Jazz and world music fans happening to find themselves in the Maynooth area on Friday, July 11 and Saturday, July 12 are in for a treat as Canadian jazz all-star Jane Bunnett and her band Maqueque bring their smooth sound to the stage at the Arlington Hotel.

Bunnett and her husband, Larry Cramer, have been working with young musicians through their Spirits of Havana project at the conservatories in Cuba for 30 years now. During this time the two have seen many great young musicians grow their talent through the project. The idea to form a group composed entirely of women came to them when they began to notice that although there were many incredibly talented female artists in Cuba, they never saw playing along with the men at the festivals or the jams.

‘The music scene there is heavily male-dominated,’ said Bunnett.

‘They’re very macho in the music community in Cuba, and so often, after some 15 years of musical training, these young women would just end up hooking up with a talented male musician. Their own careers would go by the wayside, concentrating only on the man’s career. It’s very hard for them in Latin American countries. We felt it was really important to do, because we hadn’t yet extended the possibility to any of these women and we really wanted to help some of them move their careers along, give them a leg up.’

Along with Bunnett, Maqueque is made up of five other very talented musicians; virtuoso drummer Yissy García, dynamic percussionist and vocalist Daymé Arceno, Yusa on tres guitar and fretless bass, pianist Danae, and Magdelys on batás and congas.

‘From my point of view, I feel like I’m sending a distinct message to Latin America, the Americas, the whole world in fact, by blending these forms of music, world and jazz etc.,’ Bunnett said.

‘Often you’ll see a female vocalist headliner and the band will be all-male. This group of young women are all individually extremely proficient and creative musicians and I hope that it will inspire other women to put themselves out there more, especially in Latin America.’

Bunnett and Cramer first crossed paths with Maqueque percussionist and vocalist Arceno at a jazz fest in Cuba, while she was there playing with a group of her own. From there they invited her to come and jam at the hotel where they were staying during JAZZ FM 91’s host Jaymz Bee’s Safari trip. Right away they saw such a spark in her that they took her under their wing.

Bunnett said Arceno ‘s made her cry when she learned of some of the hardships she has faced along her journey to become a

professional musician. When Arceno was a child she was told by her music teacher that she was not allowed to perform on stage with her school choir because she didn't fit the aesthetic. Claiming she was too black, too fat and too short to be part of the choir's performances Arceno was made to sit in the class alone while the choir would perform. Arceno did not give up though. Later that school year when the choir was in need of a song for Mother's Day, Arceno got her chance. Fearless and determined to express her passion to create music, the 13 year-old artist wrote a song for the choir to perform within only 20 minutes.

?She was apparently allowed to sing with the choir this time and the performance of her song apparently brought everyone to tears,? said Bunnett.

?She had saved the day. They had performed for the first time, with Daymé [Arceno] in front of a superior of the choir leader, who then asked why she had not seen Daymé before. The choir leader was reprimanded and so Daymé eventually sang with the choir before the great Hugo Chavez with whom she had her photo taken as he hugged her. The photo hit the front page of the newspaper and she has never looked back. Daymé is a very strong and persevering young woman who will go very far in her career.?

Next Bunnett and Cramer discovered Garcia. Realizing how special the music these women would create together, they began to keep their eyes and ears open for other players who could jive musically and personality-wise with Garcia and Arceno. Soon all of the band members had been assembled and Maqueque was born.

?For them, I think that with my guidance and mentoring, it helps them to see how it can be, living the life of a musician, playing every day,? she said.

?They'll have exposure to so many new audiences and it's not the kind of experience they can easily get in Cuba, where they need constant permission to play in clubs and simple necessities like electricity and proper working instruments are not always accessible. Things we take for granted every day are not easily had in Cuba. Once we even had to rehearse in complete darkness!?

Maqueque recorded their first CD, in Cuba throughout October and December of 2013. They launched their CD on June 17, at the same time the group headed out on their cross-Canada tour. More than half of the songs on the new CD were written by Bunnett, with others on the recording written by Arceno. There is also an Afro-Cuban cover of Ain't No Sunshine When She's Gone and an exciting cover of a popular 1940s Cuban piece called Mamey Colorao which Bunnett said is rarely done anymore.

?This project emphasizes vocal harmonies much more than previous works and the live performances are highly energetic and spontaneous,? said Bunnett.

2014 is shaping up to be an exciting one for the band. Already they have performed at the Toronto Jazz Festival and played shows throughout western Canada. The schedule does not slow down for the group with a number of shows in Ontario planned for July, and more dates scheduled in August and September throughout the United States.

?The tour is going really great so far and we hope to continue this project for awhile, travelling and conquering more ground,? she said.

?The plan is to tour widely around the globe while inviting special female guests from each city to perform with us. The idea is to present headlining artists but emerging artists as well, so we can help nurture their careers along the way too. Something similar to Sarah McLachlan's Lillith Fair.?

Door open at 7 p.m. at the Arlington Hotel in Maynooth, and begin at 8 p.m. on both Friday and Saturday night. For more info or tickets contact info@janebunnett.com. Tickets are also available at the Arlington, The Potter's Studio, The Maynooth General Store, the Bancroft Times and the Maynooth Farmers' Market.

