

Sillan and Young off on right Feet

By RICK OVERWATER

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You may have heard that old joke about jazz.

QUESTION: "What is jazz?"

ANSWER: "Five guys playing different songs in the same room at the same time."

No need to fear anything like that when you're listening to *Under My Feet*, the new release from Calgary five-piece Sillan and Young.

"I'm allergic to music that's too busy," says singer Johanna Sillanpaa.

"People will understand that there's skill involved, but, as a group, it's not about us showing off our chops."

For sure, Sillan and Young have plenty of chops, and between the five of them, a pretty substantial amount of jazz training.

It's apparent in the amazing vocal control of Sillanpaa, the piano of Chris Andrew, the percussion of Tyler Hornby, everywhere.

And it's for those reasons that they get mistaken for something they don't see themselves as.

"We do have those influences, but *Under My Feet* probably wouldn't be categorized as a jazz album," says Sillanpaa.

"We like to brand it as acoustic pop."

Given the vacuous nature of modern pop, at its worst anyway, that description may do their music a bit of an injustice.

After all, local pop artists don't usually draw Calgary Philharmonic cellist Tom Megee into the fold, such as they'll be doing when they release the new CD at Zsa Zsa's (formerly Quincy's) tomorrow.

But when you consider some of the artists Sillanpaa cites as influences, Nora Jones, Erykah Badu, Joni Mitchell and James Taylor, it's easy to see the crossover appeal the group is aiming for.

It's also obvious in some of the songs they choose to record. On the new record, one of the notable tracks is a carefully rearranged version of the Eurythmics' *Here Comes the Rain Again*.

"We always like to do one cover on every album," says Sillanpaa.

"On our last album, we did *True Colors* by Cyndi Lauper."

For Sillanpaa, the new album is a highwater mark that didn't seem necessarily likely when she met guitarist and chief collaborator Aaron Young at a gathering of Calgary musicians more than nine years ago.

At the time, Young was busy with the worldwide-touring fiddle phenomenon Barrage.

"We started working together when Aaron had less Barrage activity and was based more out of

Calgary. We hadn't really thought 'let's start a project together,' " Sillanpaa recalls.

At first, they did a few shows together and then things took off.

"We started writing together and that's when we realized we had something we really wanted to explore," she says.

"It seemed so natural and the songs came so easy."

Soon they added Hornby, Andrew and bassist Kodi Hutchinson to the team and today there's no looking back as far as Sillanpaa is concerned.

Since her teenage days singing on cruise ships in Sweden, her native country, she has had one plan only.

"As young as I can remember, music is what I wanted to pursue. There's never been a Plan B, and that goes for the whole group."