



Gordon Lafleur photo

KYLA CAMPBELL GIRL WITH A HORN

BY DAVID MORRISON

Before reading on I'd like you to do something for me. Head to your nearest computer, then into your preferred search engine enter this phrase: 'female jazz trombonist'. Go on, off you go!

Okay, done it? What did you find? Not much, I'll warrant. The thing is, female jazz trombonists are rarer than white ravens. It goes deeper, in fact, when you consider that Googling simply 'female trombonist' presents the forum topic 'Why Don't Girls Play The Trombone?' as the first two results.

Not a gender or music issue, just a human oddity, it is true that few women pick up this particular instrument. So few, as your search will have revealed, that the Female Jazz Trombonist Hall of Fame (my invention) consists of just one name: Melba Liston

(1926-99). Even then, despite her brilliance both as player and arranger, as an "anomaly" Liston was subject to prejudice and ridicule from male counterparts throughout her career.

Since Liston's 60s heyday attitudes have mercifully progressed, but following in her footsteps Qualicum Beach youngster Kyla Campbell is fully aware that her kind don't exactly roam in herds. In this respect she confirms that, to a degree, she too is seen as a curiosity.

"Well, the trombone isn't a popular solo instrument, like maybe the saxophone is in a jazz combo setting," she says, "but I guess for me as a female jazz musician, because jazz is so male dominated, I feel sometimes it's been hard to get acceptance. But it's not a major issue and I do put myself out there!"

on how she first gravitated towards her choice of brass, Campbell says: "The funny thing is I really didn't know what I wanted to play, then in Grade 5 my band teacher asked us to try some mouthpieces for different instruments. He saw I liked the trombone mouthpiece and said: 'Why don't you give it a try?' Originally I thought I wanted to play the trumpet or piano, but I guess all of a sudden I got good at the trombone early on, so just kind of took it from there."

And from there, this talented 19 year-old has taken it to the Schulich School of Music at McGill University in Montreal to pursue her Bachelor of Music in Jazz Performance. She feels most at home and greatly stimulated in the big city, appreciating its status as a globally recognized jazz hotbed and a major music centre, period.

"I love it!" she gushes. "There are a lot of places to play, I'm meeting a lot of great musicians and people in general, and I love the French culture, too. And in the (jazz) programme we can have a combo, so we play at Upstairs Jazz Club every week. Separately from school I've been playing in a pop orchestra, an R&B group and an Afrobeat group, so that's been really nice."

This young lady's work ethic cannot be questioned, it appears, but besides her trombone studies and several active bands, there's also the none-too-small matter of Kyla Campbell: The Singer. She has a great set of pipes that, should she decide to make a serious attempt at a career in the jazz world, will hold her in as good a stead as her instrumental prowess.

As for style, it's interesting to note that her jazz vocalist influences include the incredible Anita O'Day. I say interesting because Campbell's developing delivery is not dissimilar – where silkiness, sass, swing and intensity all meet head on. She's no slacker when it comes to the tricky art of scat singing, either. This girl has jazz in her veins.

So it comes as quite a surprise when listening to her finger-poppin' performances that Campbell is not steeped in jazz or (drummer brother Geoff notwithstanding) even from a musical family.

"My mum got me into music really early, when I was five, but I listened to The Rankin Family and pop music my parents were listening to, but no jazz, no jazz at all. I didn't really get into it until Grade 8," she reveals.

Campbell plans on graduating in four years, but when she has will she try to make it in the highly competitive world of professional music? Well, she's cautious, entertaining thoughts of continuing her education, but also feeling brave.

"At this stage I'm thinking I will just put myself out there and see what happens. It's a big step, obviously, one that at the back of my mind I don't see as too realistic at all, but I think I might!"

I say go, girl! You go take on the boys and make the spirit of Melba Liston proud. Do it for all female trombonists, wherever they may be. ~

For more information visit
Kyla Campbell's MySpace page at:
www.myspace.com/kylacampbellmusic