



NATASHA FILLION / THE GAZETTE

Rediscovering his inner Hendrix inspired Jazz Festival marketing vice-president Jacques-André Dupont to launch musical instrument shows and a blues camp.

Plenty of axes to grind at Montreal Guitar Show

Offshoot of Musical Instrument Show brainchild of marketing v-p, who also started Blues Camp

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If Jacques-André Dupont hadn't had one of those benign middle crises, it's entirely possible that a depressed 15-year-old kid wouldn't be healed by playing the blues this summer. If Dupont hadn't rediscovered his inner Hendrix, guitar fanatics from all over the world might not have a place in Montreal to gather every year and talk guitar geek. Most important, if a meeting with Montreal International Jazz Fest sponsors hadn't been cancelled at the last minute, he might never have walked into Steve's Music Store in Toronto.

That unexpected visit to the music store in 2003 was the turning point. Dupont, the marketing and business development vice-president of the jazz festival's company, Equipe Spectra, had just turned 40. He hadn't picked up a guitar in a couple of decades, but with his meeting called off and time on his

hands, he walked into Steve's. And he emerged with a Gibson ES-335.

"I took the train home and there was space to play," Dupont said during a recent interview at an Eggspectations restaurant in the Plateau Mont-Royal. On the train ride, he hammered out some remembered blues licks. "I was like a kid," he said. "From there, I got crazy."

It wasn't long before Dupont started collecting vintage guitars, creating, in the process, a Web site to connect with other collectors. Before long, the business and marketing man was right-braining his energy into promoting music-making as part of the festival. When his bosses, jazz fest honchos Alain Simard and André Ménard, gave him the green light, the Montreal Musical Instrument Show was born.

The first show in 2005 offered not only a showcase for all kinds of musical instruments, but hands-on attractions like lessons on how to

play guitar in an hour (the main secret: knowing the chords A, E and D), djembe jams and successful workshops by the likes of Pat Metheny and John McLaughlin.

This year, the instrument show is back, featuring the usual displays, activities and the 100% Guitar series, which offers free nightly shows at the new MMIS-GM Pavilion.

An offshoot of the instrument show, focusing on Dupont's first musical love,

"There are more guitars sold every year than all other instruments put together," Dupont said. "Have you ever heard of a clarinet hero?"

This year, nine ticketed Guitarrissimo concerts at Cinquième Salle of Place des Arts, by Stanley Jordan and Russell Malone, among others, are also part of the event. Free shows at the Hyatt Regency Hotel between July 3 and 6 make up the Guitar Guitar series. The guitar show itself moves to the Palais des

exhibitors, mini-concerts, lectures and workshops, Dupont said.

If one of Dupont's jazz festival projects seems close to his heart, it's the Blues Camp, which, he said, was born of his desire to bring teenagers into the jazz festival. The day camp, offered in French, gives young musicians between 13 and 17 a chance to immerse themselves in the magic 12 bars in all their manifestations over a seven-day period.

While drums, piano, bass, horns and harmonica figure into the camp's daily schedule, guitar — a staple of modern blues — is a heavy presence.

The rules are intricate, with an audition process that whittles about 400 applicants from all over Quebec down to 100 finalists. More rigorous interviews leave 55 standing. That group will spend an intensive week soaking up instruction from teachers and mentors, writing songs and forming bands — six groups, divided according to age. On the last day of the festival, the bands play an outdoor show on the Club Jazz TD Canada Trust stage.

Dupont said he has observed the life-changing effect of the event during the inter-

view process. "I hear so many things like 'I tried to kill myself and the guitar was the way I found to survive,' or 'I lost my mother and my dad this year and music is the way I got through.' I even saw a 13-year-old boy who said to me: 'I want to be the next Nina Simone,'" Dupont said.

"I see the impact," he said. "I see that we do a job not enough people are doing. There's less and less music in schools. Somebody has to step up to the plate."

The Montreal International Jazz Festival's third Montreal Guitar Show will be at the Palais des Congrès July 3 to 5. The fourth annual Blues Camp runs from July 6 to 12. The fifth annual Montreal Musical Instrument Show will be at the Village de la musique from July 10 to 12, although some activities are offered throughout the festival.

The Montreal International Jazz Festival runs from Tuesday to July 12. For further details, go to montrealjazzfest.com

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was inevitable. The Montreal Guitar Show made its solo debut in 2007. Classes, concerts and interactive activities for would-be fretbunners became as successful as the guitar exhibitions showcasing the world's best luthiers.

During the guitar show's second year, singer-songwriter Francis Cabrel bought \$70,000 worth of instruments, Dupont said.

Congrès, near the jazz festival site.

As always, Dupont said, state-of-the-art instruments by the world's best luthiers will make it the place for guitar fanatics from all over the globe to admire, discuss, buy, sell, try out and generally drool over some wondrous high-end axes. And this year, acoustic and electric models will each get their own room