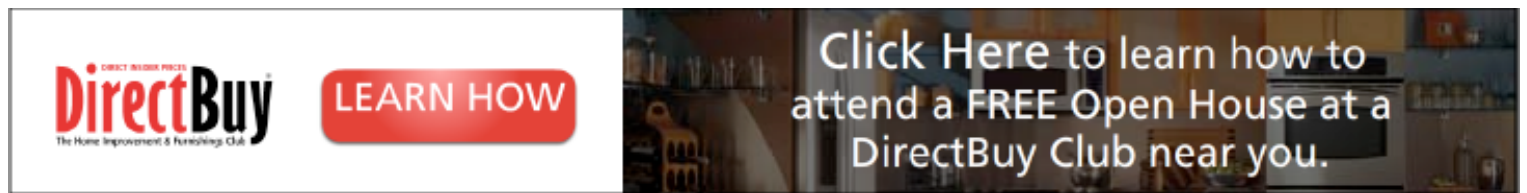


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Rockers break barriers

Quebec indie band finds itself dogged by politics of language

By **LISA WILTON**

Last Updated: 25th June 2009, 3:10am

For a band that prefers to leave politics out of its music, Malajube found itself enveloped in a very political controversy.

The Francophone four-piece headlined L'Autre St. Jean in Montreal on Tuesday as part of Quebec's St. Jean Baptiste Day celebrations.

About half a dozen hardcore nationalists called Les Jeunes Patriotes attempted unsuccessfully to disrupt the day-long concert because they were upset two English-speaking Montreal acts -- Bloodshot Bill and Lake of Stew -- were performing.

This recent language flap -- which almost resulted in Lake of Stew and Bloodshot Bill being booted from the line up -- puzzles Malajube bassist Mathieu Cournoyer.

"It's crazy that people didn't want them to play because they think it should just be a Francophone party," he says.

"To me it just didn't make sense. There are a lot of Italians here and every other culture here. It's Quebec Day, not the French Nationalist Day."

With three critically acclaimed albums under its belt, Malajube is the first Francophone indie rock band to find success outside of Quebec.

The group came to the attention of English music fans in 2006, when its sophomore album Trompe-l'oeil was shortlisted for the inaugural Polaris Music Prize and received a feature review in hipster bible, Pitchfork magazine. Its latest release, Labyrinthes, is on this year's Polaris long list.

That Malajube has been so warmly accepted in English Canada as well as the U.S. and Europe has annoyed some Quebec nationalists who feel the band is selling out its French identity.

"That's the main thing with some hardcore Francophones who want to keep the French here because they think our language is disappearing," explains Cournoyer. "But they don't really have an argument. What? We have to stay in Quebec for the rest of our lives?"

While Cournoyer, keyboardist Thomas Augustin, singer Julien Mineau and his cousin, drummer Francis Mineau prefer to write and sing in their native Quebec French, their musical inspirations come from far and wide.

"The four of us listen to a lot of French music of course, but also a lot of American music since we were kids, like everyone did," Cournoyer says.

"That's the one thing that's special about Montreal. It's Francophone but we're surrounded by English Canada and the States and so many bands from the U.K. and Europe play here, so we get to hear everything."

The language barrier hasn't stopped non-bilingual Canadians and Americans from getting into Malajube's ebullient melodies, catchy vocal hooks and crunchy guitar pop.

"It's always a surprise for us to see venues packed up when we play outside of Quebec," says Cournoyer.

"I think most French bands don't even think of trying to get out of Quebec.

"Once we started getting the good reviews we thought, 'Whoa, this could work.

"We can probably have a lot of fun going out of Quebec and maybe set an example for other bands who sing in French to try a little harder to get out of the province.' "

Malajube plays the Starlite Room tonight.

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