Cock-a-doodle blues debut

U of C band releases CD

Used to be that calling oneself a student of the blues meant your degree was earned jamming in smoky dives and studying the bottom of a dirty bourbon glass.

The Rooster Blues Band may help put those preconceptions to rest.

The band is the brainchild of University of Calgary prof Victor Coelho, who put it together just over a year ago with U of C alumnus and faculty in order to give the school's non-classical students their due.

"I always felt that we were graduating all these students from university that did not go into classical music," Coelho says.

"A lot go into classical music ... but a lot go into the popular music scene, they play in the clubs every night.

"I always felt that we didn't keep track of them as much as we keep track of our other grads, yet these people are very much part of the infrastructure of Calgary's cultural scene."

The Rooster Blues Band features an array of accomplished musicians, including Coelho on guitar, Gord Ross on guitar and bass, U of C prof Paul Woodrow on keyboards, Tom Knowles on bass, Kenton McDonald on drums, David (Jelly Roll) Morton on bass, well-known saxophonist Pat Belliveau and vocalist Zoe Nimjean.

Thursday night, the group celebrates the release of its debut CD Come On In My Kitchen with a 6 p.m. show at the Grad Lounge in the U of C's MacEwan Student Centre.

The superb disc was recorded live at the Jack Singer Concert Hall and the Rozsa Centre, and features the band schooling the audience on the history of blues with tracks ranging from the Robert Johnson title tune, to T-Bone Walker's They Call It Stormy Monday, and even the Rolling Stones' Parachute Woman.

"The blues for me is always about roots, it's about getting to the origins ... ," Coelho says.

"I usually perform Renaissance music so I'm always thinking about early styles and how early styles can live in the modern world."

If you can't make the CD release party, the band will also be performing at a United Way fund-raiser on Tuesday at the U of C's Rozsa Centre. It's just one of a number of high-profile — some might say uncharacteristically so — shows which the Rooster Band has been booked for in its short history, that has even seen them play convocation at the U of C.

"We're getting all kinds of bookings that mostly classical groups get, which is great for us," laughs Coelho. "Playing in the Jack Singer Hall rather than playing until 2 a.m. in a smoky club is just fine with us."

Mike Bell

Sound bites