



BARR HOPPING

Greg
Barr

Nesrallah's mission

Victor Nesrallah has never tried to write commercial songs with gargantuan hooks that reel the listener in. Sure, there's gold in them thar songs, but the Ottawa singer/songwriter isn't quite ready to conform to the norm.

Nesrallah began his musical career when he moved back to Ottawa in 1980, becoming a fixture on the solo circuit at spots such as Paddy's Place and the Nozzle.

At 35, Nesrallah is still doing some solo work, but he's fleshed out his music by bringing more musicians into the fold. Though his first try with a band, the appropriately named I.O.U., broke up last year, Nesrallah is back with six sidemen in a new project. On top of that, Nesrallah will release his first studio cassette Wednesday at the Rainbow (\$3 cover).

"The solo scene has changed a lot around Ottawa. There aren't really many listening rooms so it's getting to the point where it's difficult to play the material I want to," said Nesrallah. "People are yelling at you to play rock 'n' roll, and at times

you're forced into a role as a backup singer, versus the role of being the main attraction with a band at a larger club."

Nesrallah said CHEZ-FM programmers said his music sounded too 70s, whatever that is. But CHEZ's sister station Q101, which carries a lighter rock tag, will tape Nesrallah's Rainbow show for future airplay. That in itself lays some kind of borders around Nesrallah's songs.

But Nesrallah isn't alone in this quest to find the right outlet for his music. Toronto singers Shirley Eikhard and Sherry Kean have been bounced around like pin-balls from station to station during their careers.

There are some distinct influences on Nesrallah's self-titled release. The phrasing has hints of Bruce Cockburn, and then there's the Neil Youngish *What You Gonna Do*. The guitar breaks are jazz-influenced riffs with a George Benson groove.

One particular track, *Waiting For The Light* is as close as Nesrallah comes to hooks and commercialization. Add some screaming guitar and thunderous drums, and stretch out the chorus anthem-style, and he'd have a hit on his hands.

But Nesrallah says that just won't happen.

"You talk to the record companies in Toronto, and they don't want it if it won't sell to kids 14-20," says Nesrallah. "They want candy-coated songs. Look what happened to Bryan Adams. His last record had songs dealing with issues he was concerned with, and it didn't sell as well as the others."