

The spoils of Victor

flood warning

by Stephen Flood

"I've been playing professionally for about 20 years now," Victor Nesrallah calculates. Rhyming off a number of defunct local venues like the Saucy Noodle and the Bank Street Café, he adds "it used to be possible to play six nights a week, the circuit was so big."

For Nesrallah, the 1970s and '80s were mostly about performing, but the '90s have found him primarily in the studio, producing artists like Watercan and Vince Halfhide and recording several albums under his own name. He has also offered workshops in production techniques at Carleton University, and co-produced an instrument-oriented workshop with The Angstones at The Ottawa Folk Festival.

Nesrallah's primary instruments are voice, guitar and piano. But his recordings also find him handling clarinet, bass, mandolin or percussion duties. "I find it helps to be a multi-instrumentalist when you are your own producer," Nesrallah explains. "I don't consider my albums to be folk-based. They often get categorized that way, but I've never been afraid to add production to give them a more polished feeling."

For his most recent recording (his fifth), Nesrallah adopted a totally different approach. *Blood from the Stone*,

inspired in part by Peter Gabriel's album *Passion*, features Nesrallah playing live in the studio with Arabic musicians, giving the session a wonderful, spontaneous warmth.

"We knew what songs we were going to play and what order to put them in," Nesrallah says, enthuses. "And when we started to play them, all this exciting improvisation started to take place. We had a violin player who could play all these microtones, and they would be different areas that the sound could be taken — new ways of playing things that once seemed familiar."

As technology continues to make our world smaller, Nesrallah has taken steps to educate himself about what it has to offer, ideologically. And his enthusiasm and unquenchable curiosity has enriched his music. Having recently earned a degree in music from Carleton University, Nesrallah has strengthened his ideas on the musician versus the artiste.

"I'm always skeptical about the thought that there has to be this divine inspiration to create music," Nesrallah philosophizes. "Being a musician is being involved in a craft. One day the inspiration will dry up, but if you hone your craft and educate yourself about musical possibilities from other countries, there really is a never-ending source of ideas. Bach, for instance, realized all the different directions you could go in with just three notes, and would base compositions on something as simple as 'Three Blind Mice.'"

Victor Nesrallah

Wednesday, Sept. 29

Perfect Strangers, 211 Rideau St.

9 p.m.