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For jazz musicians and professionals

Pianists ! A few words with Oliver Esmonde-White, of Piano Esmonde White who talks to us about a new creative recording space in the Mile-End, L'Espace Oliver Jones.



Oliver Esmonde-White, owner of [Piano Esmonde White](#), and his team are crazy about pianos. What do they do exactly ? They repair, tune, transport, rent, and treat them like babies, but that's not enough. Oliver created **L'Espace Oliver Jones**, a unique creative and recording studio in Montréal. The new rue De Gaspé studio was launched October 14th with the great **Oliver Jones** and the main [Piano Caméléons](#), **Matt Herskowitz** and **John Roney**.

CT - Oliver, with all the existing recording studios in Montréal, what makes L'Espace Oliver Jones so unique?

OEW - "I work in many of the recording studios in Montreal. Several of them have excellent pianos... Studio Piccolo, Pierre Marchand, Planet Studios, Studio Victor, etc... CBC also has some excellent facilities. There are some other pianos which are used for recording in various concert halls. One might think that the market is saturated. But, at this time many of the studios are selling their pianos because they are costly to upkeep, take up a lot of room and musicians are using them less and less. It is so much easier to use an electronic keyboard, and electronic instruments are getting better all the time. In fact the problem is that the pianos are no longer a main staple in a recording studio and therefore most of the time they are not kept in perfect shape. L'Espace Oliver Jones has the good fortune to have use of several excellent concert pianos. This is because they are primarily being stored there, with the intention of having them maintained at the highest standards, for rental purposes. The fact that we are allowed to use these instruments and offer them to the community for recording purposes is a bonus and advantage which I believe is unique. This is what allows us to be able to offer such a unique and high-quality studio for a very reasonable price.

I know of no recording studio where there is such a great choice of instruments anywhere in the world! There may be one... please let me know where it is! So, L'Espace Oliver Jones is unique in this aspect. I also don't know of a recording studio that concentrates on the acoustic piano. We are not trying to be a regular recording studio for all kinds of situations. We are concentrating on piano and piano plus recording. The secondary area which makes the studio unusual is that we encourage people to record in front of an audience. We encourage the feel of live recordings. Most recording studios are not trying to achieve this sound as it is generally less

perfect. We just like the feeling. The third aspect that is different is that we are also equipping ourselves for simple video recording and mastering. These technologies are getting easier and easier to use as well as cheaper and cheaper. As everyone knows CDs and DVDs are selling less than in previous years. On the other hand musicians need to produce material designed to be consumed on the internet. We are trying to be part of the vanguard of that movement. And perhaps the space is also unique in that we try to make it feel cozy and beautiful. Oliver Jones is such a friendly and elegant person and we hope that we are able to reflect his spirit."

CT - Is the studio for professional and concert pianists only ?

OEW - *"Of course we are set up for the best of musicians, but we sincerely hope that musicians at all levels will take advantage of our studio. We also expect music schools to have concerts and recordings here, we expect to have a lot of seminars, on all subjects. L'Espace Oliver Jones is designed to be a great place to go to for anyone and we hope that we can manage to keep our prices very accessible."*

CT - What incited you to launch this studio ? Aren't you busy enough with Piano Esmonde White and Piano Caméléons ?

OEW - *"We just feel that we are able to do this project, and that it will add something to our society. If it were being done by somebody else, we would never consider competing with them. Piano Cameleons needs a place to record. This need, with nowhere to turn for a solution was part of the impetus necessary to get started. Nowhere in Montreal could we economically think of recording with two great concert pianos. Because Piano Esmonde White has great pianos in its care, and Piano Caméléons need a place to record, well, it is not difficult to imagine putting one and one together and ending up with this recording space. Furthermore Piano Esmonde White is dedicated to exploring as many aspects of the piano industry that it can. It is our desire to learn and research and share our knowledge about pianos. This is our business mission. It all fits together."*

CT - Will there be any public events to be held L'Espace Oliver Jones?

OEW - *"There are many projects which are developing for the space. There are about 500 artists in the building. These creative people will be using the space for lots of reasons so, yes there will be public events, many of which will not be organized by us. I expect that there will be a lot of intimate concerts which will be at the heart of recording projects. I am hopeful that the creative people around the Mile-End will use L'Espace Oliver Jones in ways which we have not yet imagined. Perhaps sortiesJAZZnights.com will think of something!"*

CT - With Piano Caméléons, great jazz and classical masterpieces are played by Matt Herskowitz and John Roney, what brings classical and jazz together?

OEW - *"Most of the classical master composers were also accomplished improvisers. All of the masters built their sound on the shoulders of earlier composers. If Bach was alive today, I am sure that he would use new rhythms and chord structures reflecting today's sounds. In fact he would probably be on the forefront of something we haven't yet heard! Piano Caméléons is exploring the old masterpieces with an infusion of today's musical influences. We are searching for new sounds and hoping that we can push the boundaries a little bit further. I suspect that in the next few months we will start hearing some really fascinating new sounds. Matt Herskowitz and John Roney are not only virtuosos, and brilliant intellectually, they are also really creative. I personally feel very privileged to have a front row in watching them develop what I believe is a new chapter in piano music. I have a feeling that this group will have a long life and that their influence will be heard around the world."*

CT - This space is also a tribute to Oliver Jones, tells us about your relationship with him...

OEW - "Oliver Jones has transcended the role of being a great musician to being that of a great Canadian icon. He has done this in part with his fingers, but I think that that is only a small part of the reason. It is his spirit which makes him a great human being. Everybody who meet him comes away richer. As a piano technician I was lucky enough to meet him when he first came back to Montreal in the early 1980s. At that time he was not well known. Partly because of our names and also that we were in the piano and music world, we ended up hanging out. I had dinner with Oliver and Charlie Biddle on numerous occasions in cheap Chinese restaurants in Union Station. They were between two gigs. Oliver and I found out that we had lots more in common! We went to watch the Expos together and a few years later spend lots of time on the golf course pretending that we could play! Ultimately I think that we just feel comfortable in each other's company. He is certainly one of the greatest humans that I have ever had the pleasure of meeting. To have him as a friend is an unbelievable honour. Our professional relationship has only deepened, as he has accepted to be the godfather of piano chameleons, and in lending his name to the studio. On my part, I want the spirit of the studio to live up to his reputation. A difficult task!"

Claude Thibault
L'Espace Oliver Jones / [Piano Esmonde White](#)
5445 de Gaspé / Montréal, QC
