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albuquerque

THE MAGAZINE

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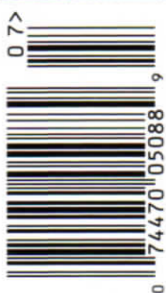
▶ **MONEY
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▶ **ON THE JOB**
WITH A CRISIS
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ALBUQUERQUE'S
FAVORITE SHOW
BEFORE THE SET
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Jim Ahrend

Photo by Denny Ahrend

Blooming in the Desert



Long Island native Jim Ahrend got a foretaste of his destiny as a kid on a family cross-country tour one summer. “I fell in love with the desert—Arizona, New Mexico, especially New Mexico,” he says. “It’s the Land of Enchantment, it really is.” The pianist/organist/composer passed this way again in 2002 on tour with the popular guitarist Esteban, for whom he was musical director for several years. Driving up to Albuquerque from Ruidoso one morning, Ahrend got to see the sun rise over the desert. “That was one of the moments for me, and I said, ‘I want to live here.’”

In 2008, he got his wish, moving from Long Island to Albuquerque. He knew only his sister here and had no work lined up, but destiny had a surprise waiting: his next-door neighbor was a church organist, and she offered him his first gig in Albuquerque, a funeral. The church setting was familiar, as Ahrend had worked as an organist for the United Church of Christ for 16 years and written many choral works, some of which had been featured in national gatherings. Today, he’s the organist at Monte Vista Christian Church.

Musically Speaking

Be sure to check out *Musically Speaking*, Mel’s blog, at www.musicallyspeaking.com.

While a classical piano major at the New England Conservatory of Music, Ahrend carried on a “clandestine affair with jazz,” he says. Since graduating, he’s worked both sides of the street as a freelance musician, playing both classical and popular styles of music. “If you can both improvise and read,” he says, “you’ve got a whole bunch of opportunities you can do.” In fact, he’s combining those different skills with a new project, Faith, Hope, and Jazz, which, on Thursday nights, will bring “weekly experiments in jazz worship” to Mean Bao, an Asian bakery on Central Avenue (www.faithhopeandjazz.org).

On Long Island, he regularly worked solo piano gigs at restaurants and clubs, and he formed a well-received trio, Karmic Tiempo. He also worked as a commuter airline pilot and a hypnotherapist. He finally had to choose between flying and music, and lucky for us, he chose the latter. The flying inspired a New Age solo album, “Child of the Clouds,” in 1990.

In Albuquerque, his fluid and inventive playing has him working on a regular basis with the Albuquerque Jazz Orchestra, Cal Haines, Rodney Bowe, and whenever he’s asked, trumpeter Bobby Shew. “Bobby’s a cat,” he says with admiration. “He’s the ultimate musician. I love him to death.” In fact, Ahrend has been impressed with the level of musicianship in the area. He cites,

“Playing solo is really for me a time to ‘shed [short for “woodshed.” musician-speak for “practice”] and get your chops and your ideas together, but if you do too much of it, your world closes in and your inspiration dies,” he says. “I need to be playing with other players and get that energy.”

as another example, Arlen Asher, who turned him into “melted butter” with a ballad one night.

While much of his work back east was solo, Ahrend has enjoyed playing with others. “Playing solo is really for me a time to ‘shed [short for “woodshed,” musician-speak for “practice”] and get your chops and your ideas together, but if you do too much of it, your world closes in and your inspiration dies,” he says. “I need to be playing with other players and get that energy.”

Other players also define Ahrend’s musical objective. “The ultimate goal in this business is to gain the respect of the people you respect,” he says. He appears to be well on the way to accomplishing that.

In addition to playing pianos, Ahrend also tunes them, and he’s a website wizard to boot, with a number of regular clients, including Acoma Pueblo. You can reach him for any of his skills at jim@jimahrend.com.

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