

## Big changes at the Outpost

A new stage, extended season and fresh financial juice fuel the city's premier jazz venue

by Aaron Emmel

**T**his spring the Outpost will move from its old 3,000-square-foot space on Morningside to a 5,700-square-foot hall at 210 Yale SE, and, yes, you should care. There are obvious reasons: By taking over the former aikido studio building, the Outpost can seat more people (from a cramped 100 seats to a comfortable 150) and the new location will make it easier for UNM students to find and attend the season's nearly 100 offerings.

But if you're looking for a more funda-

mental reason to get excited about the Outpost's rising fortunes, it's this: The Outpost would be considered a unique purveyor of live music in almost any city — but it certainly stands apart in ours; the Outpost just received a prestigious endowment, an honor that catapults them into an even higher bracket of peers; and where else in Albuquerque could you hope to catch the nation's premier Latin jazz group, Jerry Gonzalez & the Fort Apache Band (which kicks off the season at the old space on March 17)?



Jerry Gonzalez and the Fort Apache Band open the 2000 season at the Outpost — but not in the new space. photo by John Abbott

With an atmosphere "somewhere between a club, coffee shop and concert hall," as founder/director Tom Guralnick puts it, the Outpost has been one of the few reasons Albuquerque has an unusually active jazz scene for a city its size. In addition to providing a high-quality venue for musicians with an "informally respectful audience, without tinkling glasses", the Outpost is able to bring in many artists who might not otherwise be able to play in Albuquerque. Normally, a promoter like Jazz Workshop can only

book an act that guarantees a draw of at least 400 patrons. Any fewer, and renting a venue like the Hiland Theater is financially out of range. But the Outpost can host a world-class performer who might draw less than 100 people and still have the resources to pay artists' fees and foot the hotel bill. That's why David Moss, Eric Taylor, the Dave Holland Quintet and so many others were able to play the Duke City last year.

Out of the hundreds of proposals Guralnick receives annually, he tries to build as eclectic and interesting a season as possible. Jazz tops the list, however, at

itself is a money-losing proposition, not to mention the more experimental fare the performing arts space so frequently dabbles in. And, in place of the liquor sales that usually allow a jazz club to thrive, the Outpost has a serve-yourself counter with free coffee and snacks (donations accepted). Up to 35 percent of their revenue is based on ticket sales. They also rent the space out to independent promoters and have a 1,000-name list of members (a basic membership costs \$35), advertisers and sponsors.

But the driving forces behind their \$150,000 to \$200,000 annual budget — and the reason they're able to move to new digs on Yale — are grants from both public and private agencies. Most significantly, a new endowment (of a size previously reserved for symphony orchestras) has just established the 12-year-old non-profit on stable ground and honored it among only 11 other recipients in the entire country. Totaling \$500,000 over five years, the money comes from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation in collaboration with the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in the form of a \$50,000-a-year grant, plus \$60,000 a year for each year the Outpost raises at least \$40,000.

This award signals a new status for jazz across the country and recognizes the Outpost as being a prime mover on the scene. Obviously, Outpost Productions has come a long way since the Morningside venue's opening night in December 1990. The organization was incorporated in 1988 under Guralnick's dream of bringing the intimate environments of European venues to the States. The new space will carry over the same theater-type seating as Morningside, as well as adding a dance floor and nightclub-style tables and chairs.

When the remodeling will be finished and the new space finally open for busi-

ness is currently uncertain. But it will be worth the wait. And in one of Albuquerque's coolest collaborations yet, the Outpost stage will be wired directly into the Ubik Recording Studio (in the back half of the building) to enable the recording of shows. Ubik's owner, Manny Rettinger, has been Guralnick's friend for 25 years, and they bought the building together.

Another change to look forward to: A summer season. The Outpost's split performance season (February through May and September through December) was originally scheduled to allow Guralnick to work summers in New Hampshire and tour Europe in support of his own music. It also allowed patrons to escape the summer heat. But the second phase of renovation at the new building will include air conditioning, and there will be a summer series this year, even though Guralnick plans to tour with the avant-garde jazz group Tom Guralnick Trio. Things are changing. And with the Doris Duke endowment, there are now a few less things to worry about. "We have a good future to build on now," Guralnick says. "It's not the end of the story, but it's a really good start." CW

Jerry Gonzalez and the Fort Apache Band play at the Outpost Friday, March 17 at 8pm. Steve Lacy and Roswell Rudd, known for their cutting-edge post-bop free jazz, play Saturday and Sunday, March 19 & 20 at 7:30pm (with special guest Irene Aebi). Performances are at 112 Morningside SE. Tickets are \$17, \$15/members (each show) and are available at The Bookstop (268-8898) or at the door (268-0044).



Tom Guralnick in front of the new venue on Yale. It's still a construction zone inside. photo by Kip Malone

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