

Michael's Jazz Corner Review
Bert Dalton Trio w/ special guest Jan McDonald
La Fiesta Lounge at La Fonda
Tuesday Dec 22nd

To me, the piano trio is the heart of the jazz experience. Just think about who populates this genre...Bill Evans, Oscar Peterson, Keith Jarrett, Benny Green, Nat Cole, Diana Krall, and so many others. Bert Dalton's long standing trio of Bert on piano, Rob "Milo" Jaramillo on bass and drummer John Bartlit hold their own in any jazz trio comparison...and we're lucky to have them here in Santa Fe. For some 17 years, Bert and his trio have played downtown at the La Fonda Fiesta Lounge, and although the lineup may have changed a bit over the years, the quality and consistency of the music has not. So I found myself a few days before Christmas at La Fonda to once again catch this impressive trio, and walked in while they were playing the lovely Peanuts inspired tune "Christmas Time is Here Again". My first thought was, wow, these guys aren't afraid to play slow. It's such a simple but lovely melody, and Bert plays it in such a thoughtful and nuanced way, you enjoy the slow pace of the tune so you can take it all in. Milo adds to the texture of the moment by alternating between plucking and acro on the bass, while John uses the soft brushes on the drums. I think these slow tunes are even harder to pull off than a straight ahead swinging number, and this trio made it sound very sweet. Then on to a favorite on mine that's usually done with a horn section -- Cedar Walton's "Bolivia", with it's distinctive bass line driving the tune until Bert delivers the head with both hands blazing. A nice change of pace, this tune is a standard post-bop, Art Blakely kinda number that really grabs you. It got everyone's attention, and I must say the audience at La Fiesta Lounge was there to listen for the most part. Knowing that variety is the key to a good listening experience, the trio then slid into a samba who's name escapes me at the moment, but showed again how tight and tuned-in this trio is, without sounding stiff or manufactured in any way. The true essence of jazz, indeed. Then it was on to a hip version of "God Rest you Merry Gentlemen" with a Coltrane-esque intro that picked up my ears. The straight ahead groove with Bert's left hand occasionally doubling the bass line really boosted and filled out the sound. It is amazing how big a trio can sound! Then guest Jan McDonald got up with his trumpet for a sweet version of "Just Squeeze Me", with Bert providing the perfect organ patch from his multi sonically-enabled keyboard. During Bert's solo the band transformed into an organ trio (Jimmy Smith, Brother Jack McDuff, Dr. Lonnie Smith anyone?) Ah, the things you can do with Jazz! One more tune with Jan, "Tenor Madness" had me saying to myself, "Hey, I can play that!"...and before long I was! I made sure I had the right key, (an Eb for Bb tune if you're taking notes) and with an almost telepathic nod from Bert, I joined the band for a harmonica solo and then playing the head with Jan almost note for note, and in fact ending on and holding the exact same note at the end. (I don't play a lot of jazz tunes, but this one was swinging and showed that the little instrument can play along with a tenor or a trumpet.) It was an early musical Christmas for me to play with these wonderful musicians, but anyone and everyone can and should see these guys anytime of year at La Fonda for a real Jazz treat. There's never a cover, and for a few minutes you might think you're in a New York Jazz club.....