

The Three Faces of Jazz  
Fridays at El Meson's Chispa Bar  
By Michael Handler

The Friday night jazz scene at Chispa Bar was one of my first musical discoveries here in Santa Fe some six years ago, and it remains one of my favorite hangs. Drummer Bryan Lewis has assembled a consistently top notch jazz trio, augmented each week with a guest "front line" player, be it of the sax, trumpet, flute, or guitar variety. The occasional singer or harmonica player might also join in (as I have had the honor of doing a few times). Past guests have included Richie Cole, Jan McDonald, Ali Ryerson, Bobby Shew, and harmonica and piano ace Ron Kalima. So each week it's a bit different and it keeps things fresh for both the band and the regulars, who's numbers are growing. According to local jazz singer Joan Kessler, "The surprise guest each week is always so unexpectedly wonderful!"

Now, Bryan has been at this a long time...over ten years at El Meson alone. His story is now available here at *Jazz Santa Fe.com*. He has played with a who's who of jazz greats, and we're lucky to have such a veteran in our jazz community. The band has also been together as a unit most of these ten years, and it shows with the wonderful interplay between pianist Rick Bowman, bass player Richard Snider, and of course Bryan on drums and vocals. Lately, drummer Ron Ogden has been filling in at the drum chair as Bryan fights tinnitus, a condition that causes buzzing in the ears and is the bane of many famous musicians. But Brian is always there, being the MC and channeling Louis Armstrong on a tune or two. All the guest bookings are also handled by Mr. Lewis. But even with all these great players and guests every week, Bryan has a saying that "the only star on the bandstand is the music." And that's the essence of jazz itself, with its collaborative nature within an improvisational framework.

The night I was there recently featured Chief Sanchez on trumpet, and it was like a party of old friends both on the stage and off. Both on up tempo tunes or on a slow blues (like the wonderful "Georgia", played with the mute), Chief was a wonderful addition as the "fourth" face of jazz. His dedication of "Lover Man" to our own Irene Campos was especially cool. At the time Bryan looked over at me and just said, "Sweet groove...". Sweet indeed, man.