

Jazz sprouting in E. Valley

By Jennifer Birn
The Arizona Republic

The musical genre of jazz is uniquely American music that seems to be less prevalent in the vocabulary of each successive generation.

Valley residents formed the non-profit organization Jazz in Arizona Inc. (Jazz in AZ) in January 1977 in an effort to change that trend. Its goal, as stated in the group's online history at www.jazzinaz.org, "was to create an organization to encourage and support the performance and appreciation of America's great original art form."

Last year, Jazz in AZ sponsored more than 25 concerts in Arizona, according to the East Valley coordinator Bart Salzman. Yet Salzman said he was disappointed that not one of those concerts was held in his hometown of Chandler.

To change this statistic, Salzman began to focus solely on cultivating the jazz scene in Chandler. Since the beginning of 2000, he has been prolific and successful.

In April 2000, after years of urging the city to host jazz related events, Salzman coordinated a successful jazz festival. After its success, Salzman said Chandler's Parks and Recreation Department asked him to continue coordinating similar events.

Three months ago he began the Boardwalk Jazz Jam on from 7 to 9 p.m. Thursdays at Pita Jungle Restaurant, 1949 W. Ray Road, Chandler.

The restaurant, formerly rather slow on Thursdays, is cozily filled as the jazz performers play, Salzman said. The Pita Jungle Trio House Band — Sam Marshall (guitar), Peter Gitlin (bass) and Gerry Reynolds (drums) — begins the evening and then any amateur performer can jump up and follow them.

"Just show up, bring your horns (or preferred jazz instrument), sign-in and sit-in," he said. "The idea is to let



Republic photo by Jennifer Birn

Gerry Reynolds on drums, Peter Gitlin (center) and Sam Marshall play at Pita Jungle's weekly open jazz jam.

everyone play regardless of how good they are. It's the best way to learn."

On Aug. 24, Channel 3 news showed up as the talented Tony Vacca, jazz studies director for Scottsdale Community College, was soothing the ears of the audience.

Prior to Vacca, brothers and Desert Vista High School students Alex and Andrew Triage, 14 and 15 years old, respectively, took the stage for their fifth performance at the Pita Jungle Jazz Jam.

This Thursday, the jam will be a little different in honor of "Student Jam Night." The night was reserved exclusively for students in honor of a story about jazz education being filmed by the Chandler School District that will air in October on its station, Cox Channel 20.

Education is another area where Salzman has strong feelings and is attempting to materialize those feelings into actions.

"The great Chuck Mangione once said to me that in high school, kids are pretty set in their ways, either they like jazz or they don't. But the kids in elementary school are still easy to influence," he said.

Inspired by Mangione,

Salzman is coordinating a Family Interactive Jazz Day at Arrowhead Park in Chandler. Salzman's own outfit, the quintet Bart and Friends, will begin the festivities and then invite children on stage to join them. He said 600 kazoos were donated by the Snapple Beverage Co. for the event.

"Years ago, I ran a kazoo orchestra," he said. "Anyone can play a kazoo and they're cheap."

He plans to ease the kids in with nursery rhymes and then work up to jazz and blues.

Also in education, Salzman has met with 15 Chandler elementary school teachers and offered to do interactive performances with his quintet once a month at the schools.

"The key is to get jazz exposure to kids through the school systems," he said.

There will be a free jazz concert Sept. 20 from 7:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. at Chandler Center for the Arts featuring Basin Street Records recording artist Irvin Mayfield. More information: (480) 782-2680.

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Bringing jazz to East Valley

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