

Gary Negbaur (www.garynegbaur.com)

Full Reviews

Alive in New Orleans, Gary Negbaur

Robert Fontenot, Offbeat

Gary Negbaur comes from the piano tradition, but it's not necessarily the NOLA one—he's a Berklee-trained, classically jazz-based New York singer-songwriter, and his traditions run more towards Cole Porter and George Gershwin than Fess and James Booker. Yet here he is at Cafe Istanbul, serving up standards and witty originals alike while exploring the Crescent City jazz roots in his Tin Pan Alley approach. As such, you get versions of both "St. James Infirmary" and Toussaint's "Play Something Sweet (Brickyard Blues)," both "When the Saints Go Marching In" and "Basin Street Blues," a jump-blues take on Willie's "Whiskey River" and "You Are My Sunshine" delivered with a heavy nod to Brother Ray Charles.

As for his originals, they're playful explorations of trad-jazz and boogie-woogie... "Piety or Desire" is not about streetcar stops, and "Eat at Home" is not about food; songs like "Even the Ugly Ones Are Pretty" sum up that strange mix of freedom and regret that defines the local party scene... it's lots of fun anyway: Like drinking and dating, you gotta pick your battles.

What's Happening in the Clubs

Jeff Pearlman, The Tennessean

Gary Negbaur is a New York pianist who is bringing his black and white skills to Windows on the Cumberland Monday night and Pub of Love Tuesday. Simply put, Negbaur is the guy who within a year could be up there in the national spotlight with Harry Connick Jr performing his smooth, sometimes passionate piano-based love songs. Pay special attention to his version of 'Purple Haze,' a most triumphant cover of the Hendrix classic."

Piano Man

Jack Neely, Metro Pulse

Gary Negbaur's almost too modest to pass for a New Yorker - and a Harvard graduate at that. His live shows have earned extravagant raves from Chicago to Austin. Negbaur's pleased with the fuss, but chalks it up to 'the hospitality factor' that he thinks Americans habitually extend to a performer from New York.

His CD titled *Let me explain*, the last three words you usually hear from an ex-lover, came out in 1994. It was an unusual CD for a guy not quite 30 to make, with ironic but still swingin' original tunes like "Invade My Space," "Three Blind Nights," and "Alphabet Love." Negbaur is at ease with a piano, swimming through it like some kind of jazz porpoise...

Some Negbaur songs, like “Lust & Love & Faith in God” and “Red Pontiac” are strongly reminiscent of Lyle Lovett, whose influence Negbaur acknowledges. You might see Negbaur as an urban Lovett, without the large band and the large hair. But Negbaur says his greatest idol is legendary hipster piano-vocalist Mose Allison. He also resembles another piano-bar lyricist, Dave (“I’m Hip”) Frishberg.

“I met him once,” Negbaur says. “I got to see him, shake his hand - the standard idolatry.” He says he’s finding that niche, that audience of people who both appreciate jazz and enjoy lyrics.

Negbaur does some covers, though when you’re doing jazz, you call them ‘standards.’ “Jazz is about the song,” he explains. “You’re supposed to reinterpret the classics. That’s a standard. But a rock band uses synthesizers to try to recreate the sound of a recording. That’s a cover. It’s a very different philosophy.”

There’s one slow smooth, familiar standard on the record: a little number from the old days called “Purple Haze.” “I played ‘Purple Haze’ in this club at happy hour, and I did it slow, and slower. Really, the lyrics almost ask for a slower tempo. Prosody is what musicians call a successful marriage of lyrics and music: ‘Purple Haze’ seems to need a slow, misterioso kind of sound.”

Gary Negbaur’s Piano

Cityview

Don’t look for anyone smashing equipment, taking off their clothes or stage diving. It’s not Gary Negbaur’s style. “I can’t say I’ll mosh with the best of them,” says the pianist/singer/songwriter with a chuckle.

What Negbaur will do, however, is deliver witty, sophisticated songs in a loose and jazzy style that may have you inexplicably ordering dry martinis instead of beer. Negbaur’s drawn comparisons to Harry Connick Jr., among others, due to suave vocals and deft piano stylings that touch on blues, jazz and pop.

“I’m comfortable with whatever moniker they give me. But I’m a lot closer to someone like Tom Waits than Mel Torme or Connick.” Another comparison easily made is to Lyle Lovett, mostly due to Negbaur’s unique storytelling. The material shows a man with an odd sense of humor and a quirky outlook on life. On “Three Blind Nights,” a bride and the best man kill the groom on the wedding night. There is another odd twist to the tale, but who wants to ruin it.

Yet Negbaur can also tickle the ivory. He began studying classical piano at age seven, but not necessarily by his own choice. “I wasn’t that interested, but my mother was a piano teacher, so there was no escaping it.” When Negbaur discovered jazz and blues, the piano became attractive. But he still attended Harvard with a public health career in mind.

“Music was this other thing I was always doing. By the time I graduated, I had to make a choice.” His choice: music. After a few years of playing and touring, Negbaur attended the prestigious Berklee College of Music for one semester. His stay was highlighted by piano master classes with heavyweights like Billy Taylor, Ellis Marsalis and Connick himself. “It was great to see these people in the flesh and relate to them as one musician to another rather than as an audience member.”

Negbaur is currently touring the Midwest supporting his CD, *Let me explain*, which features several guests, including the Uptown Horns, who have played with the likes of the Rolling Stones, Albert Collins and Waits. But Negbaur will be hitting the road solo, peeking his head into every jazz, blues or college club he can. “I guess because I’m a little hard to place genre-wise, I end up doing a lot different types of clubs.” Negbaur feels the current climate is right for him and his brand of music. “My arrangements are fairly stark. There are other people doing well with a bare-bones approach. The success of Connick and the re-emergence of Tony Bennett have been great for me and my music. Even though I’m doing a slightly different thing, it’s coming from the same tradition.

Musician’s Breezy Style Refuses to be Categorized

Barbara Vitello, Daily Herald

Gary Negbaur is used to being cast as a jazzman. In fact, the New York-based musician doesn’t really mind the label and - after studying with musicians such as Dr. Billy Taylor, Ellis Marsalis and Harry Connick Jr. - it’s a title he can claim. But that’s not how he sees himself.

“I don’t call myself a jazz artist,” says Negbaur, a classically trained pianist who received awards in 1994 and 1995 from the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers for songwriting. “But I feel comfortable with other people calling me that.” Negbaur calls himself a singer/songwriter, even though it’s a tag often associated with folk musicians. But that’s what he is - a pianist/singer/songwriter whose lyric-driven, groove-oriented tunes are infused with a breezy style that appeals to popsters, folkies and jazz fans alike.

“In my mind, I’m closer to Lyle Lovett or Randy Newman than jazz vocalists like Mel Torme or Tony Bennett,” says Negbaur. “The folk crowd can really appreciate the lyrics, while people at jazz clubs are there for the groove.”

With mostly originals and a few clever twists, *Let me explain* features the wry, bouncy “Invade My Space” and the bittersweet “Falling Down.” Highlights include “Cold Front,” where doing the laundry masks a broken heart; “Three Blind Nights,” where Negbaur spins a dangerous love triangle out of a nursery rhyme; and a cover of Jimi Hendrix’s “Purple Haze,” which he reworks into an intriguingly supple groove. “It’s familiar and extremely unusual,” he says of his bold piano version of a guitar classic. “It rings a bell and raises an eyebrow.”

Which is exactly his intent. Whether it’s a jazz standard or a rock cover, Negbaur puts his own stamp on the tune. “If I don’t have some sort of take on it,” says Negbaur who

studied at Harvard University and the Berklee College of Music, “I’m not interested in doing it.”

“Tales of the Traveling Jewbadour”: Singer/Songwriter/Pianist Gary Negbaur

Linda Amiel Burns, TheaterScene.net

Gary Negbaur performed an evening of songs of Jewish-American composers at The Metropolitan Room for two nights on October 10 & 17 calling his show “Tales of the Traveling Jewbadour.” This included works of the likes of Gershwin, Berlin, Billy Joel, Frank Loesser, Harold Arlen and five of his own original songs.

Gary entered in a funky tailcoat and sat down at the piano and immediately took off his bowtie to get comfortable and that put his audience at ease. He opened with a live version of “Cabaret” (Kander & Ebb) accompanied by Dom Richards on bass. Gary is an accomplished pianist and is able to play in a variety of styles. Included in the program was “Jailhouse Rock” (Lieber & Stoller) showing his love of Rock & Roll, the standard “As Time Goes By” (Herman Hupfeld) and one of the highlights was an innovative Latin Jazz instrumental arrangement of “Sunrise Sunset” (Harnick & Bock). His patter was amusing as he told what it was like to travel the world for his work, even playing on cruise ships for a while. This introduced a wonderful rendition of “Sit Down, You’re Rockin’ the Boat” (Loesser) and a weather medley of “Blue Skies” & “Stormy Weather” (Berlin/Koehler & Arlen).

Yvette Negbaur, Gary’s wife, came on stage to sing “Make Some Mistakes With Me” a song he wrote for a musical performed at the Fringe Festival called Librarians in Love. Another of his originals was “Eat at Home” and the very humorous “Passover in Kansas City” with Yvette, who has a lovely voice. They closed with another original “A River Away” talking about the time they decided to move in together, she didn’t want to leave the city to move to Queens.

What Jewish mother wants to hear from her son after he graduates from Harvard University (Magna Cum Laude) that he wants to become a singer songwriter? Well, the die must have been cast early as Gary is from a musical family, his mother a piano teacher and brother and wife are singers. Even his mother-in-law, Shelli Kwiatt, is a concert pianist. Gary went on to study at the Berklee College of Music (where he had a merit scholarship). His interactive wine-tasting musical called Wine Lovers (co-written with Michael Green and Travis Kramer) will be opening at The Triad in December, 2007. Gary Negbaur is a triple threat performer and has a great musical future ahead of him. There are not many entertainers today who compose both music & lyrics, play the piano masterfully and sing. Gary is quoted as saying that “this show is a composer’s journey to his heritage and his heart.” That says it all!

Reviews: Gary Negbaur, *Let me explain* (Crazy Bird Productions)

Robert H. Rufa, Mountain Express

New Yorker Gary Negbaur is an educated jazz pianist/singer/composer - his resume lists

Harvard U. and the Berklee C. of Music and master classes with Harry Connick Jr., Ellis Marsalis and Billy Taylor. But forget about comparisons to Connick - or for that matter, to Tony Bennett, whose casual, swinging vocal style may have mildly influenced Negbaur in the womb. Negbaur is a gifted guy, and he would have found a way to shine even without electricity, never mind master classes.

Negbaur's voice was described as "suave" by an Austin weekly (where he won a prize for the best blues song at the Austin Songwriters' Group contest), and his delivery is relaxed and unforced. His piano stylings are crisp and deft, and his lyrics are witty and hip - a fine combination of talents splendidly showcased on *Let me explain*. And what if Negbaur had preceded Connick, one can't help but wonder. Would we be comparing Harry to Gary? Probably so.

All but one of the songs on *Let me explain* are Negbaur originals - the lone cover being Jimi Hendrix's "Purple Haze." Negbaur's justifiably proud of his interpretation - a lean, taunting piano/bass/drums arrangement into which he sneaks a few "O-say-can-you-see?" bars.

On "Just About Enough," Negbaur bitches about a girlfriend who spends his money, makes his house a mess and leaves him with a Visa bill. "I've had just about enough," he sings, "so I'll take just a little bit more. . . but this is the last time." Right.

"Three Blind Nights" gave me a little whiplash; at first I thought a poltergeist had sneaked a Dave Brubeck disc onto my changer. But it's just Negbaur taking liberties with "Three Blind Mice" and with hints of "Take Five" and "It's a Raggy Waltz," borrowing from one of the jazz world's all-time great innovators. . . Go listen to the man. Buy a CD.