



Hennings Returns to the Jacoby for Holiday Jazz Benefit

November 26 2012 11:03 AM

Local vocalist Jared Hennings will return to the Jacoby Arts Center in Alton with the Rev. Mercer Trio on Saturday, December 1 for a Holiday Jazz Benefit. Hennings and the trio will serve up a feast of holiday favorites and jazz standards, sprinkled with crazy fun raffles, table-top holiday lyric trivia and more. The entire event is a benefit for the First Unitarian Church and its community outreach programs serving the needs of the Alton area. The youth group from the church will be running a fair-trade café during the event and myriad Christmas cookies and sweets will be available for purchase. Add to that the artistic gift shop of the Jacoby Arts Center, and you have an event of yuletide delight.

Hennings has been performing in the Metro East and the St. Louis area for many years with a wide range of arts groups. Having a musical theater background, Hennings has performed with the St. Louis Black Rep, HistoryOnics Theater Co, and in engagements at Lewis and Clark Community College. He has appeared as a soloist with the Alton Symphony Orchestra and the Alton Muny Band. One of his performances last year was at First Unitarian Church, where Unitarian member, Marty Johnson, accompanied him on piano. The two collaborated with Marty's husband, Eric, on acoustic bass, for a subsequent gig this past September at Jacoby, which packed the house.

Both Eric and Marty are Glen Carbon natives and lifelong musicians. The couple met at Northwestern University where Eric was studying French horn and Marty was studying social policy. Their mutual love of music was one of the things that brought them together. Eric Johnson, now a hospice chaplain, took up the string bass "because French horn has limited application outside classical music. I got tired of sitting on the sidelines as Marty and her family played jazz and bluegrass, so I took up the bass and I've never had more fun," Eric said.

To perform this Holiday Jazz benefit, the Johnsons invited their brother-in-law, Neil Hershey to form a jazz trio. Hershey, a very accomplished musician, is a band director

at Wildwood Middle School, and will be anchoring the trio on drums. “We play music frequently at family gatherings so it’s a natural fit to perform together,” says Hershey.

The Rev. Mercer trio is named after the Reverend Phillip Mercer, one of the ministers of the 176-year-old Unitarian congregation in Alton who filled the pulpit during the early 1930s. The Rev. Mercer also happens to be the ghost who reportedly resides in the church building. Indeed, the Alton ghost tours start on the steps of the church and end in its sanctuary. “I thought that if we named the trio in memoriam to him he’d stop hiding my crock-pot lid that I still haven’t found from our last potluck Sunday,” Eric jokingly added.

“This is going to be a fabulous way to get into the holiday spirit, enjoy great music, support a church that does all it can for its community, enjoy a wonderful Arts center, have a glass of wine, AND pick up a dozen Christmas cookies for the office holiday party the next week,” says Hennings. “It’s going to be a great night.”

Doors open at the Jacoby Arts Center, 627 East Broadway, Alton, IL. at 6:00 p.m. with the music starting at 7:00 p.m. Advanced tickets are \$15 each, and are available at Jacoby Arts Center 618-462-5222, or First Unitarian Church 618-462-2462, or can be purchased at the event for \$20. For more information contact First Unitarian Church of Alton, therevmercetrio@yahoo.com, or The Rev. Mercer Trio page on Facebook.