

{ music }

Piano serves as storybook

John McAndrew's life becomes fodder for bluesy songs

BY KRISTEN MORALES
kmorales@gainesvilletimes.com

Some storytellers use a medium of ink and paper to craft their stories. John McAndrew envelops his stories with piano notes and his voice, bringing them to life in movies, on nearly a dozen of his albums and even an upcoming Broadway show.

McAndrew calls himself a songwriter first, but he also plays the piano and sings in a deep, bluesy voice that instantly puts the listener at ease. And it's this connection, McAndrew said, that's why he was always drawn to music as a way to tell his stories.

"Music is powerful because it connects the head and the heart, and sometimes we need to touch the heart before people can think about things," he said in a phone interview with *The Times*. "Music's a powerful way to talk about anything, so almost all the songs I write are true stories or things that happen."

McAndrew brings these life stories to The Arts Council's Smithgall Arts Center at 8 p.m. Saturday as part of the Evenings of Intimate Jazz series.

Some songs tell of events from his childhood, growing up among six siblings in various parts of the country. His father played saxophone and clarinet with Stan Kenton, and McAndrew said he knew at an early age he wanted to play music, too. Before long he had taught himself the saxo-



For The Times

John McAndrew will take the stage Saturday night as part of The Arts Council's Evenings of Intimate Jazz series.

phone, flute, guitar and piano, and realized music was a great way to tell stories.

Other songs tell of more recent events. One song he wrote after a visit to the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute was later adopted by the organization. Another, "From His Broken Soul," was written six or seven years after the events it describes took

place, he said.

"From His Broken Soul" is also part of a one-man show McAndrew is writing for Broadway, and he said Saturday's audience will most likely get a preview of it.

"I think the music kind of came and then that experience," he said of the way that song came about. "Then I tried to do the best

John McAndrew Trio

When: 8 p.m. Saturday
Where: The Arts Council's Smithgall Arts Center, 331 Spring St. SW, Gainesville
How much: \$25
More info: 770-534-2787

I can to craft a song around it. "Those are pretty magic moments."

Two of his songs can be heard in the movie "Jake's Corner," due out in a few months, and his Broadway show, planned to debut in a couple of years, will expand on the storytelling theme.

The one-man show features images from his life interspersed with stories and, of course, music. McAndrew said he's now going through all his old photographs to find ones that fit with the stories he'll weave on stage.

Audiences on Saturday will get a bit of that storytelling flavor, although without the photos — but that's OK, because the songs will create the images, too.

McAndrew said he has a deep love for jazz and blues music, and much of Saturday's performance will feature jazz standards. His original songs, too, fall into that category.

"I'm a big Hoagy Carmichael fan, and jazz and boogie woogie," he said. "I'm going to have a jazz trip — I'll tell some stories."