



Santa Fe Creative Entrepreneur Profile: Jono Manson, Maestro

Santa Fe musical entrepreneur [Jono Manson](#) has creativity in his DNA. His mother was a principle member in the **Martha Graham Dance Company**. Jono's cousins are the filmmakers **Joel** and **Ethan Coen**. It's not surprising that he formed his first all-original band in 1968 at the age of seven.

Jono Manson

New York City native Manson has influenced New York's rock 'n roll and rhythm and blues spheres including mentoring the likes of [Blues Travelers](#), [Spin Doctors](#), and [Joan Osborne](#). For twenty years he grew as an artist in the city with things going so well that one year he played more than 365 gigs without leaving the five boroughs of New York.

In 1993 Manson followed his heart to Santa Fe where he makes his mark around the Plaza and the world performing, writing, producing, collaborating and traveling with his music through England, France, and Italy where he has a huge following. He is so intensely connected to the Italian music scene that he relocated there from 2003-2006.

Returning to Santa Fe, he hit the ground running and hasn't stopped. Fresh from a performance at Madison Square Garden celebrating [Pete Seeger's 90th birthday](#), **Creative Santa Fe** caught up with rock/blues musician **Jono Manson** in his new Tesuque recording studio for a creative conversation about his perspective of the music scene in Santa Fe and what it takes to make it in his chosen career.

As he conducted a tour of his recording studio, Manson explained what it's like to be in the music business. "I feel blessed and cursed being creative as a businessman. It is necessary but it does detract from the creative process. Music and business are two words that don't belong together. To survive as a musician requires an ability to improvise – to bob and weave. Being a business person spills over into the music and takes time away from creation. Tension exists between creative expression and the nuts and bolts of dollars and cents.

I get up in the morning and make phone calls and send out e-mails about music I'm producing, checking on gigs, setting up schedules."



Jono Manson in the electronic hub of his recording studio.
Photo by Tom Mauter

CrSF: How has the SF music scene evolved over the last decade and a half?

Manson: Today the music venues don't exist in the same numbers as when I first arrived in 1993. Then I had the opportunity to play seven days a week. Now it's harder to get paid for live performances. Use 1995 as an example. Then the average rate of pay was 300% greater than working musicians receive today!

There has been an ebb and flow to the SF music scene. By 2006 the live music scene had cooled off but it became more collaborative. Now, all the clubs in town have a least one night a week for karaoke plus several feature DJs. These are challenges to live music.

There are more creative alternatives today such as festivals, **Jamie Lenfestey's [Fanman Productions](#)**, **[GIG Performance Space](#)**, and house concerts along with the number of live venues in and around the Railyard. A big plus is how collaborative the young musicians are today. There is more grassroots creativity going on, like the **[Frogville](#)** scene (a Santa Fe recording studio and distribution center built by local artists), bands that share members, ideas, seeds of new things growing.



Jono Manson (l) and Jaime Michaels perform at Santa Fe house concert
Photo by Tom Mauter

There are a handful of new live music venues and **[Music on the Plaza](#)** is great for local musicians particularly because it fosters a sense of musical creativity. That said, it is a one-time event and will not make you as a musician.

We can learn from the 6th Street music scene in Austin. They sell passes to multiple events. Why can't SF sell passes to a number of live music clubs, say in the Railyard area? We should be working together to increase the number of venues and to coordinate scheduling so musicians and the clubs can succeed.

There is another change that has come about during these tough economic times. The music business has traditionally been in a constant state of recession. Now we have more company down here. Before, musicians playing in the clubs would receive a nice meal and drinks before the show. Now we are lucky to get appetizers and have to pay for our drinks. While it may save a few bucks, this doesn't foster goodwill. In fact, it tends to make musicians feel under appreciated. I think it has to have an affect on the quality of the performance even if it's unconscious. When the musician feels appreciated it transcends the performance. When I travel abroad I'm no longer a musician. I'm an artist. Italians call me maestro and it's said with meaning. Bad gigs in Europe are better than many gigs in the U.S.

I believe that musicians should refuse to play for sub-standard pay. But the musicians have a responsibility in this equation. They must be on time, prepared and professional in their approach to performing.

CrSF: How will the demise of the College of Santa Fe Contemporary Music program affect the SF music scene?

Manson: I was asked by **Kevin Zoernig** (Founder of the CSF Contemporary Music program – CMP) to teach during its first two years. With the current state of affairs at CSF, the local musicians, who made up a large percentage of the CMP teachers, are now available for session work and gigs. This change in supply and demand of musicians could be the tip of a new wave of creativity.

During the last two years, CMP finally had the facilities, equipment and instructors needed to provide a nationally recognized program. It was coming into its own and gaining a national reputation. It wasn't the **[Berklee College of Music](#)** but who knows what the program could have become.

CrSF: What does the future look like for our musical entrepreneurs, particularly for younger folks under 30?

Manson: On one hand the future has never been more uncertain. Technology, on the other hand, holds boundless opportunities. Getting paid for intellectual property is the THE challenge. Technology has never been as accessible. A \$100,000 recording studio of yesterday can be set up in one's bedroom for \$5,000 today.

**“Musicians today
need to believe less in
the percentage of
back-end profits. Try
to get paid for your
work when you create
it.”**

[Candyman](#) (a local Santa Fe business) is a microcosmic illustration of what's going on. They have discontinued selling all forms of recorded music and the equipment to play recorded music but are

increasing their space for selling instruments with which to make music. Making music holds no limits. Selling music is hard to navigate. Musicians need creative ways to market themselves. **David Byrne** (performing June 19th at the [Lensic](#)) is a good example. It's \$41 for a concert ticket but for \$48 you also get an access code to download his new CD.

Getting paid for copies and royalties is increasingly difficult. With mp3 players and e-mail, 20,000 copies of a recording are out in three days. That isn't going to change so musicians today need to get paid as much as possible during the creation process.

Get your business act together. Younger musicians should hold jam sessions rather than coming home and turning on the TV. Don't focus only on style like an exoskeleton without any bug juice inside. Not everyone has to be a song writer. Let others know you are looking to record their work. **Nora Jones** is a great example. She had others select and even write songs specifically for her musical strengths.

The SF music scene is thrilling on a creative level seeing musicians interact. SF has a very diverse music scene that is evolving and growing.

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**Manson in his recording
studio vocals room.**
Photo by Tom Mauter

During the last ten years Manson has produced many albums here and in Europe for established musicians and emerging artists. His new studio in Tesuque was envisioned and designed to be a relaxed, comfortable creation and collaboration space. It is purposely situated in a house to be a homey environment.

Manson is working on a number of projects with a variety of artists including a Spoken Word as Channeled project, creating a score for a short film, and another involving poetry and music. He is concluding a recording session with three musicians from Italy that also includes local musicians **Mark Clark** on drums, **Peter Williams** on bass, and [Sharon Gilchrist](#) on the mandolin.

He is able to attract international and national artists to come to Santa Fe to record their work, and he hires local musicians to record with them. Thus, Manson provides locals with a week of work through this collaborative process and helps the SF music scene grow.

In the past two years Manson has worked with **Chris Ishee**, a Santa Fe-based jazz musician; [Gary Farmer and the Troublemakers](#), a Santa Fe-based Native American band; and spanning the generations, the [Fangura Marimba Ensemble](#), directed by [Sally Blakemore](#).

Manson is assembling songs for a new project, an all acoustic album, which he plans to record this summer. He is also in the midst of a song writing project with [John Popper](#), and there are plans in the works to record an album together in January 2010.

Combining passion, technique, talent, vision and creativity, Jono Manson gives the Santa Fe live music scene a brighter outlook for the future. Check him out; your ears will thank you. To learn more about Jono Manson visit www.jonomanson.net.

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