

JAZZY ANNIVERSARY

Vocalist Emerson Susan Corley never intended to start up one of Albuquerque's most popular jazz bands. With a master's in vocal performance from the New England Conservatory of Music, she was focused on the classics—until the Fates intervened.

While recovering from injuries sustained in a robbery, Corley reconsidered what she wanted from her singing, and discovered that she wanted to take more risks. So she put together a band for a one-off tribute concert to the Carpenters, whose artistry she had always admired. After rehearsing for two months, it seemed a shame to call it quits after one performance, so the group continued, enlarging its repertoire to include everything from Chuck Berry to the Great American Songbook and calling itself "Entourage, an eclectic ensemble." On August 26, the award-winning band, now called Entou-

rage Jazz, will celebrate its 10th anniversary with a concert at the Outpost.

Corley's gratitude and amazement pour out as she talks about those 10 years. "I am most grateful for the incredible music we've made together all these years," she says. "I'm most *most* grateful for our fans, because without a following, without people who come out and see you all the time and enjoy the music, then what are we doing?"

The broad repertoire of Entourage, an eclectic ensemble, began to skew more to the Great American Songbook, as the band discovered that Albuquerque has a strong audience of all ages for that material. When the group's first pianist, Lynda Abshire, moved away in 2009, Corley was frantic to find a replacement, going so far as to hang outside music stores and accost anyone who was buying a keyboard: "Do you know how to play that?"

A friend introduced her to pianist Arnold Bodmer. Though skeptical of Corley's determination to play in "every jazz

venue" in the city, Bodmer was impressed with her spirit and agreed to sign on. "I really would not be sitting here right now if it weren't for Arnold," Corley says. "He became the glue. I had had really no jazz experience at all until I met him."

Bodmer's skill as both a jazz musician and teacher, as well as his connections in the jazz community, helped mold Corley and the band into jazzers, so the group changed its name to Entourage Jazz, aka EJAZZ. About that time, Corley began studying with jazz vocalist and pianist John Proulx, who "really has helped me a lot," she says.

With Bodmer's retirement in 2015, Corley turned to pianist/arranger Roger Baker, whom she calls "our own Nelson Riddle," after the famous arranger. With the addition of Baker, the band now has a sheaf of original arrangements written specifically for its personnel.

Along the way, Entourage has released three albums and collected kudos from the New Mexico Music Awards and a number of local publications. It has played in every jazz venue in the city, fulfilling Corley's ambition, and it is working 50+ gigs a year, providing paying gigs for its core members—Corley, Baker, Lee Taylor (sax), Maren Hatch (bass), and John Bartlitt (drums)—as well as several other musicians, as needed.

While the signal contributions of folks such as Bodmer and Baker, the hard work of the musicians, and the support of fans have helped make the band a success, the real engine has been the effervescent and determined personality of Emerson Susan Corley. She's devoting her energy to producing the 10th anniversary concert, which will revisit the band's various identities sequentially, and she is happy to have past members on hand to do that—some even coming in from out of town to be a part of the celebration.

To stay up to date with the band, check out its Facebook page and entourageabq.com. Tickets for the concert can be had at holdmyticket.com, and they're likely to go fast. 🍷



Entourage turns 10 with a special performance at Outpost on August 26

Be sure to check out *Musically Speaking*, Mel's online music journal, at www.melminter.com.

If you'd like to share something with "tiempo" readers, e-mail tiempo@abqthemag.com.

PHOTO BY REECE MARTINEZ/ATM