

After Decades in New York City Omaha Native Jazz Pianist Paul Serrato Proves You Can Come Home Again

By **Leo Adam Biga**

Jazz artist **Paul Serrato** is one of those cool cats who left his native Omaha to do his thing in the big city. He carved out a nice career in New York as a pianist, arranger and composer. He has serious chops and he's well respected in the jazz world for his talents. Now, decades after leaving here, he's come back to his hometown something of a jazz legend to aficionados, though he's largely unknown to the general public. He's one of those classic cases of being unappreciated in his own backyard. That's partly due to the fact that jazz is off most people's radar. Then there's the reality that he was not in Omaha when he did make a name for himself in the Big Apple. But he's come home to stay and he's eager to share his work with Omaha audiences. My guess is he will get the recognition he deserves here before too long.

He identifies strongly with his Mexican heritage. He didn't grow up speaking much Spanish but he fell in love with the language and became an English-as-Second Language teacher for Spanish-speakers. "I've done a lot of traveling in Spanish-speaking countries. I spent a lot of time in Spain, where I used to follow bullfights. That was a whole passion of mine. I used to be a really great aficionado. I got my master's degree in urban education ESL and my last few years in New York I taught adult education in Washington Heights to mostly Dominicans. I taught bilingually."

His early years in New York he supported himself working odd jobs, including tending bar. While managing a Greenwich Village bookstore he met artists from the underground scene – poets, playwrights, painters, singers.

"That's a great thing about New York, where you just collide with people. In that New York downtown underground culture nobody was dictating you to write it this way or that way, so I was writing jazz for singers to perform in plays. I had the field to myself because nobody else was doing that. Everybody was doing like rock songs and the Velvet Underground, and I loved the Velvet Underground but that wasn't what I was doing. I was a novelty.

"I jumped into it and had some wonderful collaborations with (Andy) Warhol superstars, playing for them, accompanying them, getting acts together. I did stuff with jazz basses, walking basses, trumpet solos, all this stuff, and they loved it."

Serrato made tours of London in the 1970s. More recently he's performed concerts in Japan. His work's been featured in television documentaries, included An American Family, and in the HBO dramatic movie, Cinema Verite.

He says New York is "where I've done my most memorable creative work and I'm hoping I can transfer some of that to Omaha, and I'm having some gratifying success. I'm meeting some really good musicians.

He looks to add to a personal recording catalog that includes the albums AlterNations, Pianomania, Excursions, Origami and Nexus.

His next Addicted Cup gig is June 29 from 4 to 6 p.m.(Note—this is a performance that took place in 2013.)

Find more about the musician at <http://www.paulserrato.com>.

(Story from: <https://leoadambiga.com/>)