

On That note

Rich Lamb Along the Way

By Corey Colombin



Photo by Natalie Tucker

Rich Lamb has been a career musician for the past thirty-four years. There are some great benefits to being in the music business for that length of time. For starters, he's not sitting at a point of being anxious about his next gig, nor wondering when his big break will happen. The big list of "firsts" is already behind him. He can lean back and enjoy the ride—the smooth ride of experience. I sat down with Rich in his beautiful hand-built mountain home in Conifer, as he unfolded how it's been along the way.

Rich originally hails from upstate New York, where he began tinkering at his musical talent with the encouragement of his mom. When he or one of his five siblings would say something like, "I think I'd like to try playing the guitar," they'd come home from school to find one waiting for them. Rich did pick up the guitar and the electric bass, and two of his siblings picked up musical instruments. Completely self-taught, Rich stood up and demonstrated how he put in his time lifting the needle from the album to put it back a bit, mimicking the sound—over and over and over again.

It was an easy transition for young Rich and his brothers, Jackson and Chuck, to start a band right out of high school. They enjoyed a minor celebrity status, keeping busy playing high school dances and weddings. When Rich left the band to go to college, he didn't last one semester before his brothers came and begged him to come back home. They named the band Dry Jack. Eventually, some of the guys left the band. Just about the same time, the band of brothers heard Chick Corea's *Light as a Feather* jazz album. That one introduction to Jazz Fusion hit like a lightning bolt. They found brand new direction for the band.

They revamped the look and sound of the band and took it to Kansas City. For this new version of Dry Jack, the chemistry between the band members was so good everything seemed to just drop into their laps. Making the local circuit of gigs got them noticed. They made an amateur demo tape on a top-loading cassette recorder and sent it out. Their goal was to get some feedback, along with their rejections. Instead, in less than a week, they got a phone

call from Inner City Records, offering to make a recording straight from the cassette tape. Horrified, they struck a compromise for some studio time instead, and Dry Jack made it to a record label. With a little play on the radio, they were busier than ever. Then a big break: *Rolling Stone's History of Rock n' Roll* was published in 1980. Under the jazz/rock history heading were listed some greats, and cited as the new generation of Jazz Fusion: Dry Jack. After that, their world went upside down with popularity.

A memorable moment in Rich's music history: During this heyday of whirlwind popularity, he found himself warming up for a truly professional gig in the Village, idly looking out the window onto Fifth Avenue in New York City. His instrument of choice: a blonde Rickenbacker bass. To his amazement, who should stroll down the street arm and arm, but Paul and Linda McCartney. They paused in front of the drop-jawed Rich, where Paul pointed to his bass (his instrument of choice, as well), smiled, and gave it the thumbs up. In a blink, they were gone.

Along the way, while on tour in Vail, Rich met his wife Andrea. He took her back to New York to be with him for a while, but in 1989, they moved to Conifer to build their dream home. As for his music career, with Dry Jack long since disbanded, Rich moved into the world of freelance musicians.

For five years, Rich played bass with Hazel Miller and the Caucasians, a popular band at The Little Bear. That band broke up, but Rich still plays with Hazel Miller when the occasion arises, even performing on her recent jazz CD, *Icon*. Being a versatile, improvisational master keeps Rich in high demand, with an average of seven gigs a week. Having moved into playing the acoustic (stand-up) bass, he now has a regular gig at Del Frisco's in Denver and often stands in with the Denver Jazz Quartet with vocalist Jan Cleveland. Local favorites, such as John Erlandson and jazz vocalist Teresa Carroll, among others, also call for Rich's talents.

I challenged Rich to narrow his vast experience down to his all-time favorite gig. This was his response: "There happens a few moments each year when the music I'm playing takes on

a life of its own. The playing becomes effortless and the individual musicians seem to disappear into the music being created. It is truly a whole-being-greater-than-its-parts spiritual kind of event. It really is the reason I keep practicing and pursuing the intangibles of music. The more the machine is honed, the easier it might be to take off," he continues, "So my answer to your question, I think, would be: my favorite gig (because there is the possibility of truly creating music) is the next one."

Looking out at the panoramic view outside his home provides easy inspiration for Rich's music. He has used this inspiration to create an original CD, debuting (fingers crossed) in April. Rich describes this jazz collection as a melodic mix of acoustic driven music, largely improvisational, but styled to be a pleasant mood-maker.

He has also been inspired to create a beautiful collection of poetry, wrapped up in a book, marked with his own nature photography. *Words Along the Way* is a very personal insight into the calm and creative nature that marks his way in this world.

Along the way, Rich Lamb has met and worked with some incredible people, in amazing places. Along the way, he's found his bliss creating some truly inspirational music. Along the way, Rich Lamb has stopped and reflected, creating beautiful poetry. And this is where we find him, somewhere along the way in his musical journey. "... there is only One life unfolding as it must" from "Details of Insignificance," by Rich Lamb, *Words Along the Way*, 2006

For bookings, audio clips, performance schedules, and book locations: www.AlongTheWayHome.com or alongtheway@earthlink.net.

If you are a local musician, or know of someone who is, and would like to be showcased in "On That Note," please contact Corey Colombin at Coreycolombin105@msn.com.

As printed in the February 2007 issue of Colorado Serenity