

Taking the audience on a journey with his piano

By MIKE CHAIKEN
EDITIONS EDITOR

Jim Brickman is unique in the world of music these days.

Although he has had his share of hits working with vocalists, such as "Valentine" with Martina McBride in 1997 and "Never Alone" with Lady Antebellum, he is known primarily for his work as a solo instrumentalist on the piano.

Calling from his home in Los Angeles, Brickman said he can sing and he sang earlier in his career. But when he started his recorded music career in earnest (he released his first album was in 1994), he felt "I was not a singer with anything to say with my voice." Instead, he wanted to tell stories as an instrumental artist.

However, Brickman, who will be performing at The Bushnell in Hartford March 5 to 7, is also quick to point out that he feels these days he is more a songwriter than an instrumentalist. There are times when he wants to tell a story with his music only as a pianist. Other times, he wants to tell a story working with a vocalist.

Brickman has worked with numerous vocalists over the year. Besides McBride or Lady Antebellum, he has worked with contemporary Christian music artist Michael W. Smith and country artist Collin Raye. Each singer will bring a different dimension to a song. For example, he said he recently wrote a song for a new album that could be more of a show tune if it was sung by a Broadway-type vocalist. But if it was sung by someone like Daughtry, it could be hip and contemporary and could be a radio single.

Listening to Brickman's music, you can find yourself taken on a journey. Brickman's journey, he said, begins with a melody. "I'm big fan of a great melody." And if the melody is stirring, the audience's journey will begin.

Although his music tells a story, Brickman said he doesn't want to tell the audience what their journey should be. "I don't want



Jim Brickman performs at The Bushnell for a special series of performances this weekend.

to tell people how to feel," said Brickman.

Music has a way of being interpreted by the listener, Brickman explained. For instance, if you're going through a bad break up and you hear a particular song on the radio, you feel differently about it than if you were in a happy relationship.

Asked about his latest album, "Beautiful World," Brickman explained it "is an amalgam of inspirations from travels around the world." He said the music on the album is inspired by the sounds he heard travel-

ing in South America, Southeast Asia, the U.K. and Ireland.

Although he had been touring internationally for ten years, Brickman said it wasn't until his last trip abroad that he was "taken by the beauty of that music."

Brickman said he didn't want to record a world music album or a travelogue album, where he simply recreated the sounds of those countries. Instead, he said, "My music is influenced by those subtle differences" in the music of those cultures.

He did not win, but Brickman had the honor of being nominated for a 2009 Best New Age Album Grammy for his CD, "Faith." Asked how it felt to receive the nod, Brickman said, "It's always wonderful."

"I had been nominated before a few years ago," said Brickman. But he said, at the time, he didn't know much about the process for nominating albums for a Grammy. He just thought a committee would sit in a room, listening to CDs and say, "That's a Grammy winner."

He learned since then,

nominations are made by the people around you in the industry who respect your work. He said this makes the nomination that much more of an honor.

Brickman released his first album in 1994. So, essentially, he has held his job longer than most people do.

"I love to perform more than anything," Brickman said. Performing "is at the top of the list (of the things I like to do)... It infuses my life with adventure and inspiration."

The three nights in Hartford is one way Brickman has been able to keep his career fresh and interesting for himself.

Typically, Brickman will perform in a city for only one night. He will be in Connecticut for three days. The Hartford dates will give him time to center himself without having to worry about leaving the next day. "Being able to settle is important, it gives me more energy and more focus."

For this series of gigs, held at The Bushnell from March 5 to 7, Brickman also will be performing in more intimate surroundings than usual. Additionally, rather than performing with vocalists or other musicians for these shows, Brickman will be putting the focus on himself and his piano. "I want to give a difference experience (to the audience)."

Throughout his career, Brickman has been a

staunch supporter of PBS. He has provided numerous recorded concert performances to member stations during their assorted fundraising drives. The DVD version of "Beautiful World" is his fourth special for PBS.

"On television, there's not a lot of opportunity for this kind of concert and this genre," said Brickman. And unlike other networks, PBS is "not at the mercy of advertising trying to sell to 17-year-olds."

Brickman said he supports PBS because of the "content they provide to audiences," such as children's programs, news and information and the many documentaries from Ken Burns.

Brickman said he grew up with PBS. He said shows on PBS like "Great Performances" provided him with exposure to musical artists and music he might not have experienced otherwise.

"It's one of the last vestiges of art packaged in a way that isn't elitist," said Brickman. "It's non-commercial but it still connects to the audience educationally and entertainment-wise."

Jim Brickman will be performing "An Evening of Romance" at The Bushnell in Hartford on Friday, March 5 and Saturday, March 6 at 8 p.m. and Sunday, March 7 at 3 p.m.

For more information, go to JimBrickman.com or TheBushnell.org

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