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## AT THE SHORE ONLINE

### headliners:

## The Jost Project puts a jazzy spin on rock classics



The Jost Project will bring a variety of genres from jazz to country to Cape May this Sunday.

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### David Spatz

With a setlist that includes classic rock songs like Aerosmith's "Walk This Way," Iron Butterfly's "In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida," Blind Faith's "Can't Find My Way Home" and Donovan's "Sunshine Superman," it's tempting to label The Jost Project an eclectic cover band.

But it wouldn't be accurate. Far from it.

Jost is a lifelong South Jersey resident who's made interesting marks in the music world as a vocalist, drummer, arranger and composer — even as the music director for an Atlantic City casino — who moves easily in musical circles between a variety of genres from jazz to country.

One of his great passions for the last three years has been The Jost Project, in which he, vibraphonist Tony Miceli and bassist Kevin MacConnell reinvent rock songs as jazz numbers.

“It’s a very cool concept because it wasn’t my idea, so I can brag about it a little bit,” Jost says. “It just happens to bear my name.”

It was Miceli and O’Connell who began reimagining rock songs they grew up with as jazz numbers. Their goal, according to Jost, a native of Vineland, was to create something so different it would entice Jost to climb on board.

It worked. It just took 20 years for Jost to finally hook up with them.

Their goal with this unique twist on rock ’n’ roll was simple.

“We try and get young listeners interested in jazz by listening to the songs that were part of our lives, which have become our standards now,” Jost explains. “It’s not really any different than what I played growing up in a more traditional jazz sense, when a lot of the songs were from Broadway. They were the popular songs of the day, and they were transformed into kind of a jazz approach. And it’s really the exact thing we’re doing today, only it’s the music we grew up with in the ’60s and ’70s.”

Their ideas may be unique, but they’re not necessarily original. In 1967, the year before he died, innovative jazz guitarist Wes Montgomery released his album “A Day In the Life,” in which he took contemporary rock, rhythm and blues, pop and ballads by artists like The Beatles, The Association and Percy Sledge and turned them into jazz.

It’s hard for Jost to precisely explain how he and his colleagues develop jazz arrangements for rock songs.

“You sit down with an idea and you open your mind up to possibilities,” says Jost, who once served as music director for the original Golden Nugget casino hotel on the Boardwalk.

“It’s a much different thing than if I were arranging something for a client that needed to fall into a certain genre or a frame, that’s one thing,” he says. “But when there’s no frame to your picture, and you have a wide-open canvas, you can really explore a lot of different things.”

The Jost Project’s take on “In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida” was arranged by Miceli. What makes the song interesting as a jazz number is that it has a lot of interesting time changes in it, Jost says.

And Donovan’s “Sunshine Superman,” which was originally recorded as a psychedelic folk/pop tune? “I did that arrangement, and it has this sort of Afro-Cuban vibe to it and then it goes into this traditional swing thing,” Jost says.

The Jost Project will present its jazz twists on rock classics 8 p.m. Sunday, June 5, at Cape May Convention Hall as part of the Mid-Atlantic Center for the Arts Music Festival.

Another goal of the project is to introduce jazz to younger audiences, which may not be as difficult as it sounds. That’s because despite the difference in presentations between the original songs and their jazz takes on the numbers, the songs are still recognizable.

A good example is Jost’s reimagining of Bruce Springsteen’s “Born To Run.” Last year, he was commissioned to give the rock anthem a jazz sound.

“You knew what the song was, and you knew it wasn’t a cover band,” he says. “But it wasn’t so abstract that you could listen to it and not know (it was ‘Born To Run’). Whenever I have to rearrange something,

I always try to stay true to the melody. And lyrics are important to me, so I might try to approach the lyric with a different interpretation.”

The songs performed by The Jost Project offer the musicians opportunities for improvisation, which is one of the hallmarks of jazz.

“We honor the music so you’ll know what the songs are, but we’re not a cover band because we take some liberties with some improvisation,” Jost says.

**THE JOST PROJECT**

**When:** 8 p.m. Sunday, June 5

**Where:** Cape May Convention Hall, 714 Beach Ave., Cape May

How much: \$25 for adults, \$20 for seniors and \$10 for students  
available through Cape May

[MAC.org](http://MAC.org) or 609-884-9563

**More info:** [TheJostProject.com](http://TheJostProject.com)