

"We love our friends and we love our audience," said Mac Esposito, one-third, alongside Greg Lewis and Chris Sexton, of the Peanuts Gang Trio.

PHOTO/COURTESY CHRIS SEXTON



## Good grief

Peanuts Gang Trio

**The Peanuts Gang most people know includes the likes of Lucy, Peppermint Patty, Charlie Brown and his dog, Snoopy. The one you might not be familiar with includes Nick Sexton—instead of Schroeder—on keyboards, Greg Lewis' percussion, and Mac Esposito on bass. Both groups are known for their love of jazz, but only the latter is set to release its debut album *Welcome In* on Oct. 20.**

"Back in 2015, we all kind of shared our love for Vince Guaraldi and the music that he wrote for Charles Schulz' *Peanuts* Christmas cartoon series and decided to get together and learn all of that music and play during the month of December," Sexton said. "It kind of just blew up since then."

Lewis, Sexton and Esposito met while studying in the University of Nevada, Reno's jazz program and kept in touch throughout their individual music careers. They formed the Peanuts Gang Trio as a passion project and played a single show at the Holland Project they promoted as a Charlie Brown Christmas Concert—complete with milk and cookies. The trio chose Guaraldi's work as a standout in a sometimes clichéd genre.

"Just in general, like aside from all the 'Jingle Bells' and the Christmas standards, I feel like the

Vince Guaraldi Christmas music is very authentic because it's original Christmas music," Esposito said.

After the Holland show in 2015, the Gang found its rhythm and started booking seasonal shows around Tahoe and the Truckee Meadows every year between Black Friday and the end of December. Through steady rehearsal, timely invoicing and ironclad scheduling, they found their passion project was becoming profitable and decided to do shows throughout all of 2019.

"I think one of the reasons why we started taking it very seriously this past year was because it was the first year that all of us were out of school, and we were able to focus in, make that online presence and just communicate," Sexton said.

All three members see the Peanuts Gang Trio as a potential career band, filling a hole in a Reno market that is saturated with talented jazz musicians but lacking in formal arrangements. Making that transition away from a holiday band, though, meant diving deeper into the members' repertoire for their original compositions, and their emphasis on variety became the

foundation of *Welcome In*.

"I wanted every song on the album to be its own thing and be a little bit different from the first track and kind of demonstrates each corner of what we can do," Lewis said.

"It's like a little taste of everything," Esposito added. "We have Latin, we have swing, blues, rhythm. We have straight-eights, kind of—I hate to even call it modern. It's almost kind of like a rock feel."

Instead of a stuffy, technical performance, though, the trio said they want the album to replicate the live shows they've become known for over the past few years.

"We love the audience," Sexton said. "It's all about being entertaining, and we wanted our EP to come across as very entertaining, almost like you're in the room watching us play all these songs. Just the way that it's produced, I feel like the album really captivates that feeling."

As is common in the jazz, though, the Peanuts Gang Trio is planning to improvise a little for this year's holiday season as Lewis' graduate studies took him to Los Angeles at the end of August. He still plans to play shows when he can though, at which point they might perform as a quartet with his yet-unnamed replacement. □

The Peanuts Gang Trio will release their debut album *Welcome In* on Oct. 20.



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