

Riding wave of success, DDAT plans rare Farmington concert this weekend

Mike Easterling, Farmington Daily Times Published 2:19 p.m. MT Dec. 3,
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*Free performance will seek donations for local
nonprofit groups*

DDAT performs at 7 p.m. Dec. 7 at the Totah Theater, 315 W. Main St.
in Farmington.

Admission is free, but donations are encouraged, and all proceeds
will benefit Hustle Kindness, Navajo Ministries and the Basin Good
Neighbor Foundation.

DDAT is poised to enjoy its biggest year yet in 2020 with dozens of
performances scheduled from coast to coast.



DDAT takes the stage this weekend at the Totah Theater in a benefit concert for three local nonprofit groups. *(Photo: Courtesy photo)*

FARMINGTON — While Delbert Anderson has made himself a fixture on the local music scene over the past couple of years, it's more than a little ironic that his band, [DDAT](#), has all but disappeared from the Farmington area in that time.

It's not that group has been idle, nor has it gone underground. Far from it, in fact. DDAT — a jazz quartet that also incorporates elements of hip hop, funk, soul, and Native and Latin rhythms into its sound — is in the process of breaking out as a national act. Band leader Anderson hopes to showcase the band's evolution this weekend, when it performs its first full show in Farmington in more than three years.

DDAT will perform a free concert for three local nonprofit organizations, giving its local fans their first chance to see the group perform a concert since April 2016. The combo, which has flirted with a higher profile for years through appearances on NPR and exposure in Smithsonian.com, finally caught fire in the latter half of 2019, paving the way for a busy and profitable 2020.

Anderson said DDAT already has approximately 50 engagements booked next year, most of them taking place in locales scattered around the country, and is negotiating dozens more. That includes three performances in New York and two in California. The group will augment its touring schedule with the recording of a new album and film industry work, he said.



The local jazz quartet DDAT has seen its national profile rise considerably over the past several months. *(Photo: Courtesy photo)*

By way of comparison, Anderson, a trumpet player who serves as an adjunct music professor at San Juan College, said the band has played only 40 to 50 shows in total over the last four years. DDAT's quick move into the fast lane is largely the result of Anderson's ambition. Scouring the Internet a couple of years ago for new opportunities for his band, he discovered the [Western Arts Alliance](#), a Portland, Oregon-based organization dedicated to presenting and promoting performing arts throughout the western United States and Canadian provinces.

Anderson, a Shiprock native who now lives in Farmington with his wife and four children, reached out to the group's officials and found a warm welcome. He was invited to take an active role in the organization by serving on some of its advisory committees, then he

applied for and received a coveted spot in the organization's [Launchpad program](#). Over the course of three years, Anderson and other emerging artists in the program receive technical assistance, professional development, mentoring, promotional benefits and membership in the alliance. Much of that help takes the form of financial assistance designed to boost an artist's technological or creative capability, including the purchase of new software or recording equipment. Anderson declined to say how much money that amounted to, but he said it is a considerable amount spread out over the three years.



The members of DDAT pose for a group photo before a performance at Flushing Town Hall in Queens, N.Y., on Dec. 2. *(Photo: Courtesy photo)*

Mostly, though, the Launchpad program has put Anderson's band — which also includes vocalist Christopher Bidtah, bassist Mike McCluhan and drummer Nicholas Lucero — in front of people who can help artists take their career to another level. DDAT has taken full advantage of that exposure, delivering a well-received showcase performance in late summer before an audience of music business professionals in Los Angeles that included booking agents, management representatives, A&R people, publicists and recording industry executives.

Anderson said DDAT received 40 to 50 booking inquiries immediately after its performance, and many of those contacts bore fruit, resulting in contracts for shows around the country. As DDAT's profile has increased over the past several months, so has the size of its guarantees, Anderson said, driving up the group's income. Among the audience members at the Los Angeles show was jazz bandleader Rodney Marsalis, cousin of jazz icons Wynton and Brandford Marsalis. Anderson said Rodney Marsalis was effusive in his praise of DDAT afterward, extending an invitation for Anderson and Lucero to join him on a short tour with his group — an opportunity Anderson hopes to take advantage of early next year

In January, the quartet will perform at another music industry showcase in New York — essentially an East Coast version of the event it was featured at in Los Angeles — and Anderson hopes to make a similar positive impression there. If it does, the stakes likely will be raised again for a band that is experiencing its first real boom.



Farmington's DDAT receives an enthusiastic response from the audience during a Dec. 2 performance at Flushing Town Hall in Queens, N.Y., on Dec. 2. (Photo: Courtesy photo)

Anderson — who also serves as president of the San Juan Jazz Society, a local nonprofit organization devoted to promoting the growth of live music in the Farmington area — acknowledged that can create stress and pressure for artists, like himself, who have a family and are trying to juggle those interests with their newfound career demands. That's why he's grateful that the Launchpad program includes mentoring for personal, as well as professional issues.

"They supplied us with a music-oriented therapist, I guess you could say, who literally went through all the really hard questions with us — 'Is your wife OK when you're gone? How much money do you need to be making to make up for being gone all this time?' " Anderson said. "I got really lucky I ran into a program that really considers your family and where you're at in life. They were really concerned about taking care of me first."

Another sign of the WAA's commitment to its artists, Anderson said, is the fact that DDAT has been assigned a mentor who will visit Farmington this week to attend the concert and to spend time with the members of DDAT in their home environment.

"I hope he sees we're very caring and generous individuals who love our community," Anderson said. "And we want to show him that

although our community is very small, we're still a world-class act and can hang with the bigger guys. We're kind of a Cinderella story."

DDAT performs at 7 p.m. Dec. 7 at the Totah Theater, 315 W. Main St. in Farmington. Admission is free, but donations are encouraged, and all proceeds will benefit Hustle Kindness, Navajo Ministries and the Basin Good Neighbor Foundation. Call 505-327-4145.

- *Mike Easterling*



Smithsonian
National Museum of the American Indian

Navajo Fusion: DDAT Crosses Genres and Generations

Issue From: Winter 2018 | Vol. 19/ No. 4

Jazz and hip-hop met about four years ago at the Survival of First Voices Festival at San Juan College in Farmington, N.M., and decided they got along together very well. The result was the jazz/hip hop quartet known as DDAT, which released its self-titled debut CD in Spring 2018.

The group is the fusion of the Delbert Anderson Trio (DAT) with the solo rap performer Def-i, hence the acronymic name. DAT, the jazz trio, is comprised of Delbert Anderson (Bitaani Claashchi'i/Kinclichiinii Todachiinii Clans), Nicholas Lucero on drums and Mike McCluhan on upright bass. They have been playing as a group for a little better than five years, although they've known each other much longer. They met Def-i (Christopher Mike-Bidtah) about four years ago at the Festival. They've been performing together ever since.



DDAT performs at the Jemez Pueblo Ruins in Jemez, N.M., May 2018. Clockwise from bottom left: Delbert Anderson, Mike McCluhan, Nicholas Lucero and Def-i. Photo by J. Morgan Edwards Photography.



DDAT's album released at the 2018 Gathering of Nations Powwow in Albuquerque, N.M. Cover art created by Dumper (aka Dump la Rock aka Dumper Foo). Photo by J. Morgan Edwards Photography.

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“We didn’t know him, personally,” Anderson says of Def-i. “But, when we played a show, we invited him to join us, freestyle. We put it together really quick. People really liked the different genres fused together.”

In true jazz tradition, the quartet began as pure improvisation. But it is now a directed collaboration, actually composing songs together. Anderson laughs, “We thought we would just keep going with it, keep pushing towards whatever it is. We’re still fairly new. But, there’s a lot in store.”

The DDAT sound is reminiscent of the jazzy/hip hop groups Digable Planets, Gang Starr and A Tribe Called Quest. But, where Digable Planets featured spoken word poetry over smooth jazz, DDAT mixes Def-i’s rapid-fire lyrics over more up-tempo, contemporary jazz and funk. In another key difference DDAT composes all its own original music, as opposed to sampling music from other musicians.

The combination works because the styles are not competing. Def-i says, “I feel like we both complement each other. The older crowd seems to like the jazz and the funk elements. And the younger crowd seems to like the rap styles. It’s a contrast, just like colors contrast and complement each other, I feel like our different genres do the same thing in audible form.”

Anderson elaborates, “The Trio had the songs already. We just had to switch it up so Def-i could come in and rap over it. For our new release, those [songs] were specifically written for both of us. Usually, I’ll come up with a melody. And, I’ll take it to the group, and Nick composes his part. I don’t write out everyone’s part. And, Mike just sort of picks up what he wants to do. And, then, Def-i comes in.

“Once we bring it all together, we start to try to fuse it a little better, move things around a little – try to create some

structure. Like when Def-i is singing, sometimes it's just Def-i and the drums going at it. Sometimes, it's just Def-i by himself."

Anderson continues, "We know how each other are, as musicians. We're all individual composers. But, we all know the fundamentals of playing with one another. We know how to collaborate. I think that's what is really special about this group."

The trio has its roots in the Farmington area. Lucero recalls meeting McCluhan at San Juan College about 15 years ago. "I was a young drummer, and he was this crazy, bass-playing guy with a ponytail and a black and white Rickenbacker bass." They don't limit themselves strictly to the jazz genre. Their broad range includes everything from jazz to pop funk. Lucero has toured with local and nationally recognized musicians over the course of his career. "I've played with Kevin Eubanks, Bud Shank [and] Greg Abate in the jazz realm," he says. "And I've toured with The Ionics and Cold Fusion as part of the Vans Warped Tour."

In the mold of the Wu-Tang Clan, the two musical groups still maintain their individual performance and recording identities. Def-i (Mexican People/Red Streak in the Water/ Many Hogans Clans) released his latest CD, *Arrow Rhythmanics*, in April 2017. Staying true to hip hop culture, Def-i shares the spotlight with a few fellow artists. In particular, he makes a special effort to showcase the talents of several female MCs and rappers, including his close friends Honey, A. Billie Free and Cilena Gonzales. He says, "Having the female voice on this album was huge. I felt like I needed to add more of my female friends [in my] music projects."

His latest release marks a significant departure from his previous recordings, in that it features other artists' beats. He

describes the process, “Usually I’ll have my own hand in. I’m producing my own music. But I did this whole project with none of my beats. I used other producers from across the country, [even some] from Canada. So, it’s a wide range of different kinds of beats. It’s not one style of production.”

DDAT, the combined group, prides itself on its mass appeal. Its shows attract audiences from across generations as well as across genres. Anderson, who also teaches music at San Juan College, says, “I think we have a really unique product. [We] relate to the younger crowd, who love hip hop. Who come from contemporary music. It also relates to a lot of the seniors who love the whole jazz aspect. We get comments like, ‘I never thought I would like hip hop.’ Or, some of the younger ones say, ‘I never thought I could find jazz that amusing.’ It’s really neat!”

Lucero echoes that point: “I’m able to improvise and move around and solo, which is unique for the hip hop genre. But, it speaks to our influences from the jazz and jam styles of music.”

Their musical expertise and gifts are not going unnoticed. Def-i was recently selected for the Next Level Musical Ambassador Program, an initiative of the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Next Level brings people together and encourages greater understanding through the universality of music as a form of creative self-expression. It also builds on the historic legacy of the Department of State’s Jazz Ambassadors, who first traveled the world in the 1950s.

After traveling to Washington, D.C., for a two-day orientation, Def-i excitedly proclaims, “I am headed out soon to teach, learn and share with the youth of Nigeria as a U.S. Hip-Hop ambassador for beat making/music production. Love and light to all of the fam that truly believe in me. Your support

truly means a lot! I was super-humbled and empowered by all of the artists that helped share, build, encourage and inspire me (and, each other) over these last few days of orientation.”

Def-i had a previous connection to the program in the form of fellow artist, Junious Brickhouse. The two met years ago while Brickhouse was traveling through Shiprock, N.M. Def-i retells, “After his service as an artist-educator, he became a co-director of the program and encouraged me to go through the application process. I was very impressed by the program and also highly respect the practitioners I knew that have participated in the program in previous years.” This is the fifth cycle of the program, with seven other countries participating in partnership. The Next Level program selects one artist-educator per hip hop element per country, so there will be 28 in total.

The young rapper was grateful for the opportunity to share not only his artistry, but his culture. “As a Diné MC, I have a unique story to offer along with my style and rhymes. I plan on just being myself and sharing what I have been gifted in hip hop. Mostly, I am looking forward to building with other MCs and I know Nigeria has amazing MCs throughout the country. I believe I will learn just as much as I plan to share.”

Anderson, the music teacher at San Juan College, plays a variety of instruments, He is a life-long musician who began singing and playing the drums at a mere three years of age in the church choir. He later developed a love for jazz.

Stylistically, he has been heavily influenced by Lee Morgan, Sonny Rollins and Esperanza Spalding, among others.

He cites numerous supporters. “I credit my aunt, Cecelia Woodis, and uncle, Philbert Anderson, for pushing me as an artist and teaching me the importance of consistency. Other individuals who have made a difference in my life are my

elementary and middle school band teacher, Janet Isham, and the faculty of Eastern New Mexico University: John Kennedy, Dustin Seifert and Chris Beaty.”

The Delbert Anderson Trio’s first album, *Manitou*, has received multiple Indigenous awards in New Mexico and on the West Coast. The album has also been recognized by NPR and Sirius Radio as Today’s New Jazz. One of the earliest collaborations performed by DDAT was the track “Roadrunner.” Anderson recalls, “I composed [that] piece for NPR’s Tiny Desk Concert competition. The trio performed it with hip hop lyricist Def-i. It received an NPR Top Ten Honorable Mention. It has also been featured on Yahoo and MIC.com as the best Native American jazz music piece.”

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The DDAT sound is uniquely its own. Anderson attributes that to their relative isolation. Their removal from the din that can sometimes come from working in a larger city has helped them focus more on developing their own sound. As he sums it up, “We’re not trying to copy anyone else. Or, trying to incorporate ideas that we heard. Everything is just strictly staying here. All the ideas that come forth are emerging from this area. So, we’re using it to our advantage and coming up with a unique sound.”

The band members were as excited as their fans for the release of their debut CD. Anderson contrasts the experience with the making of his first CD, *Manitou*, as the

Delbert Anderson Trio. He says the first recording “was actually made onstage at the Totah Theater, Farmington, N.M. We did a live performance. And, it was basically push record and stop. We didn’t get to edit anything or do anything special with it.”

This time, he says, the DDAT CD was made in an actual studio. “We were waiting for a while. It took a while, but we got it done.”

There is no greater testament to a musician’s skill than his connection with the crowd. Lucero recognized DDAT’s “aha moment” when “we played at Marble Brewing and I saw two floors of people jamming and enjoying the songs and solos and dancing. It’s one thing to rely on cultural influences and build an audience. But it’s a completely different thing to cross genres and cultures and stand on our own, as artists, rather than cultural clichés.”

Fans and potential fans alike can find these groups at ddatlive.com.

AUTHORS

JASON MORGAN EDWARDS

Jason Morgan Edwards (Seminole/African-American) began his career as a freelance writer and photographer in 2010, after retiring from the Environmental Protection Agency. He has written for Native Peoples, Indian Country Today Media Network, First American Art, Navajo Times and The Independent (Gallup), among others.



THE TRUTH WELL TOLD

Independent

Groove warriors

By Richard Reyes

GALLUP — The distinctly Southwestern bounce of the Delbert Anderson Trio brought to mind an old-timey cartoon train bobbing through the desert, puffing smoke to the beat.

Like a steam engine chugging to a start, the drums pumped slowly and gradually increased in tempo. Then the upright entered with a swaggering bass line, and the trumpet came in with an eerie, .uttering melody.

Then, as if it had too much to drink, the trumpet melody began to sway all over.

“You can see all the squiggly lines on the composition,” trumpet player Delbert Anderson explained after the band performed the song at the Church of the Holy Spirit in Gallup Aug. 20.

Anderson wrote the song while on a train, so the shaking and frantic turns of the locomotive came through in the melody.

“That’s the reason why the song does not sound normal,” he joked.

The song, titled “Iron Horse Gallup,” tells the story of the trio - which includes drummer Nicholas Lucero and bassist Mike McCluhan - disembarking from the Indian Capital of the World via train through the Navajo Nation toward Los Angeles and back again.

You can hear their arrival in L.A. as the song shifts into a faster tempo and jazzier sound. The trumpet paints a picture of a wild party further emphasized by a boisterous drum solo.

Navajo chants meet modern jazz

The Delbert Anderson Trio - which formed in Aztec about 3 1/2 years ago - plays several songs with a similar duality. They started out playing jazz standards but quickly went into composing their own songs.

“We started digging a little deeper into our own cultures,” Anderson explained. “For me it was the Navajo tribe. I did a lot of study on early Navajo music - all the way down to when it was just chants.”

The song “New York Navajo” from their album “Manitou” exemplifies this. It opens with a man singing what sounds to be a traditional Navajo song. The voice and Anderson’s trumpet perform a sort of call and response between those traditional melodies and modern jazz.

Anderson said Navajo chants tend to have a natural swing to them, which provided the perfect transition into jazz.

On one side you have jazz, which was born in the United States, and on the other side you have indigenous melodies. So in a way, the Delbert Anderson Trio is playing an ultra American sound.

Another example of this is the song “Groove Warrior.” The opening beat is reminiscent of a drum circle and the trumpet again sounds like a wavering Navajo melody - for the music nerds out there, they rely heavily on the pentatonic scale. But things take a twist as the bass comes in with a psychedelic effect like a Herbie Hancock song. That’s when the drums and trumpet kick into a jazzy aesthetic.

Though they’ve been labeled a Navajo band, they are multi-cultural and pull together influences from several places. Lucero brings a funky, Latin sound on the drums while McCluhan is a jam band player who takes his inspiration from the Grateful Dead.

“I think jazz tends to be a little intellectual, and that’s the beauty of it, but when it comes to an average listener, I think we make it more of a visceral kind of experience,” Lucero said. “We have the heavy bass lines and the funk drums, and you can feel it a little more.”

Hip-hop fusion

If that weren’t enough of a musical cocktail, Albuquerque-based rapper Def-i, the Shiprock-born Christopher Bidtah, joined the trio during their Gallup performance, fusing hip-hop into their sound.

Together they’re known as DDAT. They met at a festival one year and Bidtah performed some spoken word atop their music. Then they wrote a song together, “Roadrunner,” and recorded a video of their performance at the Sunflower Theater in Cortez, Colorado. They entered the video in NPR’s Tiny Desk Contest.

Although DDAT didn’t win, NPR recognized their video with an honorable mention in March.

“‘Roadrunner’ makes it evident that these artists also share a forward-thinking restlessness and a refusal to be parceled into neat boxes,” NPR stated.

DDAT is recording an album that Anderson hopes to release before the end of the year. They performed some of their songs at the church and illustrated one of the coolest aspects of both jazz and hip-hop: improvisation.

Between trumpet solos, Bidtah freestyled while interacting with the crowd, commenting on the things people wore as well as the venue’s decor. A clearly proficient wordsmith, he incorporated religious themes in his rhymes and spit ridiculous tongue-twisters.

A poet herself, Tammy Iralu, a member of the Church of the Holy Spirit and organizer of the concert, said she enjoyed Bidtah’s poetry.

Iralu said a local family funded the show, so audience members were asked to make a donation to benefit Battered Families Services Inc., which helps survivors of domestic violence, and All Together in Dignity Fourth World, which is dedicated to literacy efforts locally.

DDAT will be going on tour through the West in September, starting with a show at 7 p.m. Sept. 13 at the Totah Theater in Farmington. Check their Facebook page for more details and dates.

Def-i also recently released a video on YouTube for the song “The Land of Enfrackment” in solidarity with all nations taking a stand against the Dakota Access oil pipeline.



Indian Country Media Network

SERVING THE NATIONS | CELEBRATING THE PEOPLE

5 Musicians to Blast This Summer: 2016 Hot List

ICMN Staff

July 17, 2016

Delbert Anderson – Coolest Way to Avoid Jazz Fusion Confusion

Navajo jazz trumpet player Delbert Anderson and his band landed on the top 10 NPR Tiny desk concert list recently and that led to a series of steady gigs for the jazzman from the Four Corners area. He played shows all over Albuquerque during Gathering of Nations, and on his off-night he sat in with pueblo reggae band Innastate and captivated the house at Marble Brewery.

The band that was Delbert Anderson Trio has now become DDAT, with the addition of rapper Def-I, and people are reacting in a positive way. “The DDAT has been doing very well,” says Anderson. “Every venue has been 100 percent packed. We are working very hard on our first album. This album is going to be a huge step for DDAT, many labels are taking notice and wanting to work with our fusion music. Well known labels and AR men have been giving us great feedback. Something big will happen soon, I promise.

“I am very happy to work with such cool, professional guys. Each member of DDAT is world class at their craft. The world is going to be welcoming DDAT into their music playlists soon.”- J.A.

NAVAJO TIMES

NEWSPAPER OF THE NAVAJO PEOPLE

The Delbert Anderson Trio, featuring Def-i, Shine at the New Mexico State Fair

Native Village

Jason Morgan Edwards

Delbert Anderson (Diné) started off by wowing the crowd with his smooth, classical jazz riffs. Then, Def-i (Diné) introduced lyrical acrobatics over top to form DDAT. Their sound is reminiscent of the jazzy/hip-hop groups Digable Planets and A Tribe Called Quest. But, where Digable Planets were more spoken word poetry over smooth jazz, DDAT mixes Def-i's rapid fire lyrics over more up-tempo, contemporary jazz and funk.

The Delbert Anderson Trio, comprised of Anderson, Nicholas Lucero (drums) and Mike Mc Cluhan (upright bass) has been playing as a group for a little better than three years, although they've known each other much longer. They met Def-i (Christopher Mike-Bidtah) about a year ago. And, they've been performing together ever since. Anderson recounts their meeting, "We met at the Survival of First Voices Festival. We didn't know him, personally. But, when we played a show, we invited him to join us, freestyle. We put it together really quick. People really liked the different genres fused together."

What started as improvisation has developed into a concerted and directed collaboration, with them actually composing songs together. Anderson laughingly continues, "We thought we would just keep going with it, keep pushing towards whatever it is. We're still fairly new. But, there's a lot in store."

The combination works because the styles are not competing. Def-i says, "I feel like we both complement each other. The older crowd seems to like the jazz and the funk elements. And, the younger crowd seems to like the rap styles. It's a contrast, just like colors contrast and complement each other, I feel like our different genres do the same thing in audible form."

Anderson continues in that same vein, "The Trio had the song already. We just had to switch it up so Def-i could come in and rap over it. For our new release, those [songs] were specifically written for both of us. Usually, I'll come up with a melody. And, I'll take it to the group, and Nick composes his part. I don't write out everyone's part. And, Mike just sort of picks up what he wants to do. And, then, Def-i comes in."

"Once we bring it all together, we start to try to fuse it a little better, move things around a little -- try to create some structure. Like when Def-i is singing, sometimes it's just Def-i and the drums going at it. Sometimes, it's just Def-i by himself. So, there's all kinds of ways [we play]."

Anderson says, "We know how each other are, as musicians. We're all individual composers. But, we all know the fundamentals of playing with one another. We know how to collaborate. I think that's what is really special about this group."

The Delbert Anderson Trio released one album, Man Tou, in 2014. Def-i has been doing his thing for about fifteen years. He has recorded four solo albums, so far. But, the DDAT album is scheduled for release later this year.

Fans can view DDAT's video, Roadrunner, at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=gh2K1eAokks. The Delbert Anderson Trio's music can be found at: www.delbertandersontrio.com/, as well as one facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/delbertandersontrio/>. Def-i's music is available at: <https://soundcloud.com/def-i> and www.facebook.com/defrapper/.



10 More Tiny Desk Contest Entries We Loved

March 22, 2016 9:42 AM ET

Def-i And The Delbert Anderson Trio, 'Roadrunner'

Recorded at the Sunflower Theatre in Cortez, Colo., "Roadrunner" is a collaboration between Albuquerque rapper Def-i (given name: Christopher Bidtah) and a jazz trio led by trumpeter Delbert Anderson. Def-i and Anderson's trio each count indigenous music of the American Southwest among their influences, but that's not the only reason this project melds together so well; "Roadrunner" makes it evident that these artists also share a forward-thinking restlessness and a refusal to be parceled into neat boxes. —RH