

## Craig Brenner – “Passages”

I can't think of anything Craig Brenner cannot play on piano. He loves it in every color: classical, jazz, blues, Cajun, zydeco, rock, boogie-woogie, reggae and beyond. With a solid foundation of musical study in Florida and the Indiana University School of Music as springboards, Craig amassed a toolbox of skills: composing, arranging, improvisation, performance and the discipline such studies require. Constantly gigging brought Brenner to stages with an amazing number of well-known musicians. Simultaneously he earned acclaim through a storied, day-job career in community service—while parenting two musically gifted sons—“My greatest accomplishments.”

The blues overtook him in the 1970s, followed by the discovery of New Orleans Cajun music in general and Alfred “Uganda” Roberts and Professor “Fess” Longhair specifically. Boogie-woogie became a major part of his repertoire and inspired him to create an annual “Bloomington Boogies” festival in 2015. The regularly sold-out weekends feature boogie-woogie and blues with folks like Marcia Ball, Bob Seeley, Henry Butler, C. J. Chenier, Judy Carmichael, Stephanie Trick & Paolo Alderighi, Mitch Woods and other local, national and international artists.

His current CD, “**Passages**,” is Brenner’s eighth release (2020) and part of a larger musical project made possible by the Indiana Arts Commission which receives support from the State and the National Endowment for the Arts. Adorned with jazz, blues, sadness, humor and hope, this is a powerful collection of Brenner’s enviable talents, notably the composition of “For My Brother”—a moving instrumental. Craig’s powerful left-hand rhythm shines, (Katie Webster once told me “It’s all about the left hand, mama.”) beneath a breathtaking array of right-handed improvisation in varying rhythms without losing time anywhere. The tunes reflect a backward look on past events such as the death of his brother, the pandemic-related isolation of his mother and the hard-won realization that, “No matter how dark the night, the sun rises the next day.”

The recording, expertly done by David Weber at AirTime Studios in Bloomington, IN, includes musicians: Brenner —piano, organ, vocals; Lori Brenner—vocals; Merrill Garbus on vocal and Nate Brenner on bass (Tune-Yards—Merrill appears courtesy of 4AD); Ron Kadish—double bass; Dan Hostetler and Tim Brookshire —drums,; Mike Baker and Gordon Bonham—guitar, Joe Donnelly and Jake Belser —sax, Dena El Saffar —violin and viola; Kyle Quass —trumpet; and Dave Pavolka—trombone. Album art was created by Craig’s talented wife Lori.

About the only questionable thing about Craig is, his puns are *groaners*. (You’ve been warned!)

--Cathi Norton, Finally Productions,  
Writer, Playwright and Musician