

Bluesman Ken Arconti is sitting in the 'Catbird Seat' with his new album

By **BETH PEERLESS**

It's a big week at the Kuumbwa Jazz Center. Not only for its own productions, but also for those from outside sources, such as the CD release concert with Ken Arconti for his third as a leader, "Catbird Seat."

Leader is a bit of a misnomer, since he is the one and only person performing on the 16-cut release on Jungle Beach Records.

Although it is entirely acoustic, with a majority of blues-based music played on guitar and sung solo, at the Saturday evening event he'll also be performing with a band, and he'll offer up a variety of styles.

In the band are bassist Steve Evans, drummer Randy Hayes, keyboardist Luca Fredericksen and backup singers Trish Pate, Craig Owens and Scott Owens.

The Los Angeles born-and-raised 58-year-old came to Santa Cruz in the late '70s equipped with the ability and interest to play just about any style music required.

In a telephone interview with him the day after his Valentine's Day birthday we compared notes on what it was like growing up with radio stations that played all types of music, he in SoCal and me in NorCal.

The whole of the '60s decade offered some of the best radio, bar none, with at first the AM dial offering stations that were Top 40, but not with just pop music of all persuasions, but soul, R&B, blues, rock 'n' roll, and the emerging talents of the British Invasion groups that, of course, included The Beatles and the Rolling Stones, not to mention The Kinks, Spencer Davis Group, so on and so forth.

But what stood out for many of our generation was the blues, because it came through in the groups that flooded the emerging album-oriented, freeform FM stations that are legendary in retrospect.

Groups like Cream, with Eric Clapton on guitar (a favorite in Arconti's list of influential bands) informed not only ears with rock as a preferred sonic flavor, but found the blues played hard and stretched out in long, improvisational forays that primed one to accept jazz as a perfectly good alternative-style music. It was all revolutionary and all cool to us.

Thus, Arconti has skills in all these styles. But when he found himself in a challenging time in his life, where he was faced with a relationship breakup and some medical issues on top of it, he found solace and strength through his time alone with his acoustic guitar.

Nothing speaks louder than the song "Ask Me 'Bout Nothin' (But The Blues)," a song I remember primarily from its rendition done by Boz Scaggs. The soul of that song is based on being left alone with the blues. It is what playing the blues is all about.

So, during times as rough as these we live in today, the music Arconti offers on this recording will most certainly speak to many who are living with the blues. Maybe you'll find some solace in knowing these lyrics speak to what you've seen in your life.

"Ask me how does a man feel, when he's got the blues. And I'd say, misused, abused, downhearted and blue. Know the reason I know this, is cause the blues is all I was left with. Oh, I could tell you how it feels, when you got a dirty deal. I could even tell you how it hurts when you been stepped on and treated just like dirt. Ask me why do all good things have to come to an end. I don't know, Lord have mercy, I don't know. You see, ask me nothin' but about the blues. The blues is all that I was left with."

The Keb Mo-written tune "Standin' At the Station" has some very cool guitar playing, reminiscent of something you'd hear Joni Mitchell play on her open-tuned guitar, taking a blues riff and putting a Fairport Convention-like spin on it.

He includes two Bob Dylan-written songs, "Highway 60 Revisited" and "Cold Irons Bound," plus some other classics like "Outside Woman Blues," "Key To The Highway," "Pride and Joy," "Born Under A Bad Sign" and "Signed, Sealed, Delivered I'm Yours." Two of the tunes are originals, "Catbird Seat" and "Wishing You Good Night."

Here's wishing Arconti a good night sharing music with his friends and fans, in celebration of his sense of self-sufficiency, achieved through playing and singing solo and feeling the blues as only someone who is living it can do.

The concert begins at 8p.m. for all ages, tickets are \$15 advance, \$18 door. Visit www.kuumbwajazz.org for ticket outlet info.