

Z'Amico: A world of sound... in Berkeley Thursday

by Andrew Gilbert

January 15, 2014 9:00 am

At 26 years old, David Eagle hasn't had a chance to travel much outside the United States. But by just about any measure the Berkeley percussionist is a supremely cosmopolitan artist well versed in many African diaspora rhythmic traditions. He plays the trap drums Thursday at [Ashkenaz](#) with his hard-grooving Afro-Brazilian-Caribbean band [Z'Amico](#), and then picks up the washboard as a member of the funk-soul-reggae combo FenToN CoolFoot and The Right Time.



Weaned on capoeira, the graceful Afro-Brazilian martial art dance form, Eagle



Hard-grooving Afro-Brazilian-Caribbean band Z'Amico plays Thursday at Ashkenaz. Photo: Z'Amico

credits the East Bay's wealth of musical talent with providing an invaluable cultural education.

"This is the coolest place ever," Eagle says. "I haven't even been to Brazil yet or Cuba, but I've played with Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Brazilians, Jamaicans. It has everybody you can imagine at the top levels. Either I'm playing with them or I can go see them at La Peña or Ashkenaz, venues that understand the importance of music."

While he plays in more than half a dozen ensembles, Eagle continues to gather more information. He studied jazz drumming with Alan Hall at the Jazzschool and recently took timbales lessons from Louis Romero, the New York salsa legend who played and recorded with Celia Cruz, Rubén Blades, Héctor Lavoe, and Willie Colón before moving to the Bay Area in 1984.

All of those influences end up in the mix in Z'Amico, a sextet featuring singer-guitarist Andrew McKleroy, bassist Alex Riddle, trumpeter/vocalist [Erik Vertz](#), saxophone and flute player Sean Norris, and lead guitarist Kevin Glaz. Eagle and Riddle first met in the Berkeley High Jazz Band, and launched Z'Amico after graduation. The band has performed intermittently over the past six years, with Ashkenaz serving as a home base. They play original songs and tunes by artists like Ponto de Equilibrio, João Bosco, Edson Gomez, the Gladiators, and Bob Marley.

"It's really a hybrid," Eagle says. "We do some covers, but songs that not many people know. We've got a lot of originals too, some in Portuguese, and some in English. We do a lot of reggae, but definitely have the Brazilian flavor. I've also done a lot of playing with Haitians, so there's some compas thrown in."

When he's not playing Afro-Caribbean and Brazilian grooves, Eagle has found himself immersed in sacred music, playing old hymns for services at the College Avenue Presbyterian Church. Playing in a local reggae band, Fire Squad, he got to know guitarist/producer Paris King, who invited him to play at the church about a year ago. He's been part of the ensemble ever since.

"It's really old timey music, not modern worship, the kinds of songs that I wasn't at all familiar with," Eagle says. "It's great stuff. I play music as a spiritual thing. It's a religion to me. Being able to be in a church where people see the music as part of their worship has been amazing."

Andrew Gilbert lives in west Berkeley and [covers music and dance](#) for the San Jose Mercury News, Contra Costa Times, Los Angeles Times, Boston Globe and East Bay Express.

To find out what is going on in Berkeley and nearby, be sure to check out Berkeleyside's recently launched [Events Calendar](#). We encourage you also to submit your own events.