

SAM PAYNE

Just as the 1960s became the 1970s, a young folk singer/songwriter named Marvin Payne fled the suburbs of Los Angeles and found a home at the foot of the Wasatch Mountains in Northern Utah. There he and his wife, Niki (a violinist from the San Francisco Bay Area), grew a family and developed a faithful musical following, far from the dollar-fed Southern California music magnates. Marvin Payne's music rode the wave generated by poet-musicians like Bob Dylan and Woody Guthrie, right into the living rooms of college students up and down the Intermountain West.

A quarter century later, Payne's children (mostly grown now) have exponentially carried their parent's musical drive into their own communities, all with the same homespun sensibilities that rescued their folks from the West Coast. Daughter Eliza remains the sweetheart of Northern Utah musical theater stages, and is a perennial favorite as both a classical vocalist and a jazz singer. Sons David and Joseph haunt Salt Lake City and its environs as prolific and energetic rock songwriters. Son Josh, a sometime New Yorker, pushes the envelope of jazz, wringing sounds from his old Gibson that baffle and delight audiences from one end of the country to the other.

It may at first seem strange then that when Marvin and Niki Payne's oldest son, Sam, came to Southern Utah in 1995, it wasn't as a musician at all. Sam Payne came to St. George to teach religion. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints hired him as a seminary teacher. Sam pulled up stakes as an accomplished actor and children's performer to head South, and for a year or so kept a low musical profile with his wife, Kristie, and his son, Skyler.

Then, in April of 1997, an accomplished west coast drummer named Korby Ollerton approached Sam Payne. Ollerton had himself fled from the Southern California punk scene some years earlier (after stints with numerous bands, including the act that became "Social Distortion") for the peace of Utah's Dixie. He had heard Payne perform an original tune for a church youth group, and suggested that they play together. Almost immediately to the picture as well sprang Payne's oldest friend, keyboardist David Dalley, who had just moved to town as a schoolteacher and counselor.

The "powerfolk" of the Sam Payne Trio seemed to appeal to a wide cross-section of ages and tastes, and the band enjoyed a stable following on the festival and concert-series circuit, playing for enthusiastic audiences that included (perhaps not surprisingly) healthy numbers of old Marvin Payne fans.

It was early in 1999 when Payne and Ollerton came together on another project. This time, the serendipitous ensemble included saxophonist Scott Dalton, his wife Mami on keys, and all-around musician Carlyle Potter on Bass. "The Utah Jazz Quintet" as the group came to be known, surprised locals (especially, perhaps, fans of the Sam Payne Trio and other Ollerton projects) with polished and innovative interpretations of jazz standards. The "Jazz" quickly became a staple of the Southern Utah music scene.

Lately though, it has been Payne's quiet return to the performance of his original music (and to Northern Utah) that has turned the heads of critics and audiences around the West. Alone or

backed by his band (The Sam Payne Project), Payne's arresting stage presence, his craft as a poet, and his soaring tenor voice have established him as an enduring and engaging performer; the songwriter's songwriter.

The press has said of Sam Payne's music: "Payne is one of those few musicians who can successfully combine both songwriting and stage performing. He can write poignant and meaningful lyrics, combine them with a melodic hook, and perform them in a voice that makes you want to close your eyes and drift away."