

# Take 5! Five Questions: with Sandy Asirvatham

**Jeff** on April 12, 2010



Photo courtesy of Sandy Asirvatham.

*Laurel Fehrenbach, public programs assistant here at American Art, manages the free Take 5! jazz concerts, which take place in the Kogod Courtyard every third Thursday from 5–8 p.m. She talked with Sandy Asirvatham, who will be performing vocals and keyboard with Frank Russo (drums), Max*

*Murray (bass) and Jeff Antoniuk (sax) at Take 5! The program, A Tribute to the Tax Man with Sandy Asirvatham, will take place on tax day, Thursday, April 15, in the museum's Kogod Courtyard from 5–8 p.m.*

**Eye Level:** Sandy you have your BA in Economics and an MFA in fiction writing both from Columbia University, and you started out as a journalist for Baltimore's *City Paper*. How did you get into the jazz world?

**Sandy Asirvatham:** I was procrastinating! When you work from home as a freelance writer—which I've been doing successfully since 1995—there are certain pitfalls. I managed to avoid the obvious ones, such as raiding the refrigerator every half hour or cleaning house obsessively. But I couldn't resist the temptation of the piano in the living room. Eventually I embarked on a ten-year process to learn how to play, improvise, and compose in the jazz idiom. I guess my procrastinating was unwittingly strategic.

**EL:** Do you still write fiction, or are you focused on songwriting now?

**SA:** It's a complicated question, actually. I'm a compulsive storyteller, ruminator, and commentator, but the form is always changing. Sometimes I'm moved to write lyrics, other times it's fiction or nonfiction prose. At the moment I am working on a longer piece of prose (which I dare not call a b\*\*k, yet). I also spend a ridiculous amount of time composing pithy Facebook status updates.

**EL:** Did your economics background inspire the idea for A Tribute to the Tax Man?

**SA:** I had a dual major in philosophy and economics, which means I am a doom-and-gloom type by both nature and training. Our country's economic challenges have had me worried. This concert is my attempt to lighten up a little and (I hope) help the audience do the same. After all, money problems are nothing new to humankind.

**EL:** What influences your original compositions?

**SA:** Everything, actually. But if I have to be specific, I'll give a special shout-out to Radiohead, Shirley Horn, Chopin, Nick Drake, and Dr. Seuss.

**EL:** Have you filed your taxes yet?

**SA:** Of course not! That would take too much adrenaline out of the process.



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