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## Lawyer hits notes on faith through jazz

### Tecson balances 'day job' with touring church musical group across the globe

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Last weekend, a Chicago attorney received an international standing ovation.

Joined by some of his regular bandmates and a conductor, ensemble and choir from Hanover, Leipzig and Dresden, Germany, Andrew P. Tecson performed an hour of jazz chronicling the end of Jesus' life, complete with a mourning horn solo marking his crucifixion and a soaring musical jubilation at his resurrection.

Tecson, a principal at Chuhak & Tecson P.C., performed in Leipzig and Berlin with his Chicago-based Christian jazz group ChurchJazz on March 4 and 5.

It was the European premiere of the group's album, "A Jazz Passion," their third album to date.

"The last performance was at the American Church in Berlin, and the pastor there said they had never had that many people at a performance before," said Ken Jandes, one of Tecson's bandmates, his first saxophone teacher and a friend of 50 years.

Tecson, who has been playing jazz since high school and attending church since he was baptized, said jazz in church was a natural fit.

"Worship is supposed to be, at least part of the time, joyful," Tecson said. "Part of the Psalms talk about making 'a joyful noise to the Lord,' and we definitely do that,

but we also pull back and we recognize there are people in the congregation who are going through chemo, who may have just lost somebody, so we reflect the whole gamut of human emotion and worship experience."

Tecson started playing saxophone when he was 10 years old in an elementary school band, then embarked on learning jazz at Riverside Brookfield High School.

It was through the Riverside Presbyterian Church, where he was baptized and his mother still attends, that he met Jandes and started taking private lessons.

"I always saved his lessons for the very last, because we'd end up going two and a half, three hours," Jandes said. "He was just like a human sponge."

Jandes had just finished studying music theory, composition and performance at Illinois State University.

"I had all of this fresh in my head and then in walked Andy Tecson as a freshman in high school," he said.

He said Tecson picked everything up naturally.

"I probably learned more from him than he did from me," Jandes said.

Tecson said music has always been special for him. Music can express a whole set of human emotions — from joy to sorrow to deep lament — without saying a word.



Andrew P. Tecson (center), principal at Chuhak & Tecson P.C., plays the saxophone in ChurchJazz, a jazz ensemble. Tecson is the principal composer and band leader. The band plays regularly at the Saint Luke Ministries church at 1500 W. Belmont Ave.

"That magic that it creates for people — it's very much a very special blessing to be able to share that with people," he said. "Particularly with jazz, you see people smiling, you see people tapping their toes or nodding their head. There's a lot of interaction, because jazz allows you to improvise."

Tecson grew up hearing about the law from his father, Joseph, who founded the firm he is now principal of, and from his mother who was also a practicing family law attorney. Tecson worked at his father's firm during the summers.

Still, Tecson had time to briefly become a professional jazz musician before he committed to studying the law.

*"Worship is supposed to be, at least part of the time, joyful."*

As an economics major at Northwestern University, Tecson studied abroad for a year at the University of Munich and worked at least two nights a week playing in jazz clubs. He became a member of different bands there and traveled, playing in Berlin, Stuttgart, Hanover, Frankfurt and Hamburg. A jazz pianist invited Tecson to tour with him through Spain, but Tecson chose to go back to college instead.

"That was sort of the decision

point: 'Am I going to do law or music?'" Tecson said. "I decided I'm going to have law be my vocation but, you know, people can do more than one thing in life."

Tecson said he always admired how being a lawyer led his mother to be on the school board and involved in other community activities and his father to be in various governmental roles. Tecson decided he wanted a career that would give him the freedom to give back like his parents did.

Tecson went to law school at the University of Chicago. On the side, he made contact with Steve Goodman — he had met the local folk songwriter in Germany — and performed with Goodman and the likes of Howard Levy as well as in a country-swing band.

However, after law school, Tecson stopped carrying his saxophone into the night.

"I didn't enjoy staying up late and playing in bars and nightclubs as much," Tecson said. "And I also was intrigued at the thought of combining my worship experience at church — since I'd been going to church my whole life — with music."

Tecson sought the help of a mentor, Martin E. Marty, a professor emeritus at the University of Chicago Divinity School. After Marty's wife died of cancer, Tecson said one of their strong sources of continued faith were the Psalms, because they were a

combination of lament, praise and narrative.

Tecson decided to compose several jazz compositions using some of those Psalms. He dedicated the collection in memory of Marty's wife.

"I find the texts of the Bible to be extremely rich and exciting and vibrant even though they're thousands of years old," he said. "Texts can be timeless and we can use contemporary language musically to express timeless themes."

Tecson formed his new band, ChurchJazz, and performed what he recorded as an album titled "Jazz Psalms" on June 19, 1982, at a church conference in Valparaiso, Ind.

In 1982, ChurchJazz was one of the first groups to regularly play jazz in church with a six-piece band replacing the more traditional organ or piano.

Tecson said he hasn't had time to promote ChurchJazz because

he has "a day job, as we call it in the music world," but the group gained local attention and performed on a nationally broadcast Christmas Eve service and on the BBC's "Songs of Praise" program. They've played places from New York City, Minneapolis, St. Louis, Colorado and, now, Germany.

Meanwhile, Tecson continues to lead what one of his clients described as an excellent legal practice.

David G. Abrahamson, a pastor at Saint Luke Ministries, met Tecson nearly 30 years ago.

After hearing "Jazz Psalms," Abrahamson started "bugging" Tecson to compose a jazz Mass. Abrahamson said jazz is "the quintessential American music form" and religious jazz would be another form "to translate God's message to people."

Abrahamson composed the libretto of ChurchJazz's most recent album, "A Jazz Passion." He

used contemporary language, titling the story of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples "Rub A Dub Dub" and Tecson and two other band members composed the work's 12 pieces.

Abrahamson said Tecson is "one of the best" and the only attorney he ever recommends.

"He pays attention not only to the billable hours but the response to giving back when one has been blessed with success and faithful service to others," Abrahamson said.

Like his parents did, Tecson spends his time outside of work on the boards of various nonprofits, having now been on 10 in fields like health care, social services, child welfare, mental health and music. He also works on fundraising, including with a ChurchJazz concert that raised \$70,000 for the Clarke Cares Foundation to send mosquito nets to villages in Nigeria.

Tecson, his wife Nancy Hagen

and friends are starting their own nonprofit, a farm retreat in downstate Illinois where church and school groups can camp on 65 acres of wooded land with a stream, birds, flowers and insects. Tecson said he hoped it could help teach kids about the Milky Way galaxy, ecosystems and how to reduce their carbon footprints.

About 70 percent of Tecson's private-practice clients are 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations.

On April 9, Tecson and the ChurchJazz group will perform at the St. Peter's Lutheran Church in New York City, then fly to Slovakia to perform at the Constantine the Philosopher Church in Nitra on April 11.

But first, here in Chicago, ChurchJazz will give its annual Jazz Passion performance on April 2 at 4 p.m. at its home base, the Saint Luke Lutheran Church at 1500 W. Belmont Ave. Admission is free.