

SANDIA & HIGH DESERT

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Neighbors

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Sandia Heights and High Desert

Chile Pi



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Also Inside:

Is A River Cruise Right For You?, pg. 8

Why Do We Keep Stuff?, pg. 10

New (and Old) Idea To Try In The New Year, pg. 17

Chile Pi

By Alissa Ranf | Photos by Kim Jew Photography



You might be asking yourself, what is Chile Pi? Are we talking green chile pie, or some form of math you learned in junior high? Chile Pi is actually a musical duo you may have seen around the neighborhood! Susan McCasland and John Martinez compose the acoustic duo that is Chile Pi. John wanted to name their band Frito Pie, as he is a native Burqueño, but Susan already had her mind made up about Chile Pi. They are known for their tight vocal harmonies and John's blazing guitar work. The two together create fantastic music of many genres: folk, rock, country, blues—you name it, and they've probably played it!

John, as stated earlier, is a native of Albuquerque. In addition to playing with Chile Pi, he plays many solo gigs and has been in several previous bands playing jazz, funk, and rock. John and his wife, Renee, love the Albuquerque area and live in nearby Glenwood Hills. You may have seen him play all over Albuquerque at places like Mykonos Taverna and Café, The Sheraton Uptown Hotel or Sandia Casino. John is also a licensed Realtor with Berkshire Hathaway Home Services since 1992. As he puts it, he is "Albuquerque's Musical Realtor," and kind of a jokester, too.

John is also a guitar instructor. He started playing guitar at the young age of nine. He played rock music up until college,

where he was compelled to learn classical guitar. John studied guitar at the University of New Mexico and after graduating, he attended the Guitar Institute of Technology, GIT, in Los Angeles. For him, this was a breeze as he already had a degree in guitar, so his year at GIT was a lot of fun. One of his most memorable gigs was playing for KUNM radio on a Friday night with his friend singer songwriter Glynn David Harris. Keep in mind that this was during the 1990s. By chance, Bill Richardson, the Secretary of Energy in the Clinton administration, happened to be listening to KUNM that night and loved what he heard. One thing lead to another, and John and David were asked to perform at the Tennessee Inaugural Ball during the second inauguration of Bill Clinton!

Susan is quite the opposite of John, and this contrast makes them the perfect duo. Susan has a Ph.D. in astrophysics and has spent the majority of her professional career as a systems engineer. As she put it, "I'm a hard-core techy." She has been in the Air Force and in industry working with space systems and laser systems, and currently works on Kirtland Air Force Base for The Aerospace Corporation. Her husband, Neil, recently retired from the Air Force, so they spent many years moving around.

Continued on page 7

In her free time, Susan always played music. Any time they would move to a new place, she would get involved in the music scene. One of her favorite bands she has been in (excluding Chile Pi, of course) was a Celtic band called Hot Toddy in Denver. She has little formal music education, but quite a bit of worldly education. Susan has been in bands, choirs and madrigal groups all over the U.S. After retiring from the Air Force, Susan and her husband decided to move back to Albuquerque, as they had lived here before and loved it. When they had the opportunity for the first time to choose where to live, they picked Sandia Heights!

Chile Pi has been busting out good tunes for about two and a half years. If Chile Pi looks familiar, you may have seen them play at one of your favorite restaurants! Chile Pi plays at the County Line BBQ Restaurant, Piatanzi, Pappadeaux's, Standard Diner, El Patron, Lizard Tail Brewing, Barley Room, and many more. In Uptown they play at Alien Brewpub, on the West side you may have seen them at Desert Greens, and they of course play at the world-famous Range Cafe in Bernalillo.

"We try to play as much as we can, and try to fit in as much as we can," says Susan. Music can be therapeutic for the both of them, and John is happy to be playing music 70% of the time while selling houses 30% of the time. He currently has about 23 guitar students and loves teaching. For Susan, the inspiration comes from her love of performing. She loves interacting with the audience and John enjoys seeing people enjoy his music. "The better the audience, the better we play," explains John. "It's a great feedback loop," says Susan, "that increases the enjoyment for us and for the audience."

They make a good team, with John's guitar work and Susan's amazing singing skills. John calls Susan Miss Sweet Voice, and Susan calls John Mr. Fast Fingers. John also sings, and they harmonize well together. As a teacher, John always tells his students, "If you want to be a real guitarist, you better fall in love with practice." Both John and Susan love the hard work and dedication that comes with being musicians. When Susan travels for her day job, instead of watching TV in the hotel, she tries to find an open mic night to practice.

Upon arriving in Albuquerque, Susan knew she had to find people to play music with. After one unsuccessful group, John found her on bandmix.com. Their musical styles worked well together and here they are today! Chile Pi can be found on Reverb Nation at <https://www.reverbnation.com/ChilePi>, and on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/ChilePi3.14/>. Chile Pi's musical genre falls into folk rock, but they play a range of music from the Beatles to the Civil Wars, traditional to today. Their core is 60s and 70s light rock and folk rock. As a soloist, Susan drifts more to Folk, Celtic, and Country, while John sways more to Jazz, Rock and Classical Guitar. They do a handful of original songs. With both of them working, it can be hard to find the time to create original music. One of their original songs is called "Morning at Molas," and you can find it on their Reverb Nation page. John wrote the music and Susan wrote the lyrics. Check out Chile Pi's music online and hear for yourself how great they are, and check out their Facebook and Reverb Nation pages for their local performances!