



Bryan Lubeck (left), along with Ed Skjoldal and Marcus Robinson, perform during the October shoot for Lubeck's "Tuscan Sky" video at the Tabor Hill Winery in Buchanan. Lubeck and his five-piece band return to the area Saturday to play the Box Factory for the Arts.

By JEREMY D. BONFIGLIO  
HP Features Writer

**ST. JOSEPH** — Bryan Lubeck may not have grown up in Southwest Michigan, but he certainly considers it to be his musical home.

The internationally acclaimed smooth jazz and Spanish guitarist recorded his first song with St. Joseph native and music industry stalwart Dave Carlock. He credits Tabor Hill Winery in Buchanan, a venue he played early in his career, for inspiring his sound. And the Box Factory for the Arts — where Lubeck returns with his five-piece band on Saturday — is where his instrumental guitar career began.

"It's where I got my start, where my career was crafted and where it took off," Lubeck says by telephone from his Chicago home.

Since then, Lubeck has built his reputation by blending Latin and urban sounds on the instrumental CDs "Acoustic Vineyard," "Vineyard Groove" and his holiday album "We Three Strings." He was the featured guitarist at the 2010 Smooth Jazz Awards, and his latest release, "Tuscan Sky," has spent more than 16 weeks in the Top 40 of the smooth jazz charts. We caught up with Lubeck earlier this week to talk about the album, his strong local ties, and Saturday's musical homecoming.

**Q** The last time you were here, in 2012, you debuted "Tuscan Sky," and the album is still going strong. What do you think it is about this CD that has given it such staying power on smooth jazz radio?

**A** It was a soft release and a lot of stations picked it up, and then when we did radio promotions this spring I thought people would go, "Oh, we've heard it already," but they kept playing it and the spins kept increasing. It's been pretty amazing. What really came together with this latest CD is I knew what I wanted. I knew who I wanted to

### IF YOU GO

► **WHO:** Bryan Lubeck with Samuel Jay & Jewels  
► **WHEN:** 7:30 p.m. Saturday  
► **WHERE:** Box Factory for the Arts, 1101 Broad St., St. Joseph  
► **HOW MUCH:** \$18, \$12 for students and seniors  
► **CONTACT:** 963-9688 or [www.boxfactoryforthearts.org](http://www.boxfactoryforthearts.org)  
► **ARTIST INFO:** [bryanalubeck.com](http://bryanalubeck.com); [samueljayandjewels.com](http://samueljayandjewels.com)

have as musicians on the album and who I wanted to engineer and mix it. I was actually more excited about the people on the project than I was initially about the music itself. I had written some catchy tunes, but it really came alive with the musicians that I had. When you hire the best people, good things are going to happen.

**Q** Speaking of those musicians, the list is pretty interesting. There's Jim Peterik, who wrote "Eye of the Tiger," playing keyboard on a couple of songs, and keyboardist Vijay Telis-Nayak. You have drummers Jonathan Marx and Kahari Parker, who's been on tour with everybody from Justin Timberlake to Alicia Keys, and even local percussionist Ed Skjoldal. How were you able to get such a diverse group on board?

**A** We decided to be really smart about it. I'm still an independent musician, so getting all these people in a room together for a couple of weeks would have cost a fortune. Instead we decided that we are going to allow these awesome musicians to do their stuff in their own time. I set up a spreadsheet with all the songs on it and all the people I wanted on each song. We would always start by recording the bass and the drums and I would cut a scratch guitar part down. Then we'd ship it off to one of the keyboardists who would lay down all this

great stuff to choose from. Then we'd send it off to the rhythm guitarist. What happened is you'd have all these really cool moments that sounded like we had played together for years, but it was really everybody playing off and building on each other's work.

**Q** The album's title track, "Tuscan Sky," is the latest single. What can you tell me about that song?

**A** With instrumentals, I usually kind of wait to name songs, but this one was always "Tuscan Sky." Like most of my music it's inspired by the idea and the grandeur of wine country, especially in Tuscany, where it's such an old tradition, and you also have the ties to Spanish guitar. Some of the album is a little groovy and there's some funk in there. Each song has its own character and its own hook, but that title track is really what I built the CD around.

I knew that it was good when I started playing it with a band. I hire all different kinds of people every time I play, just really great touring musicians. And after rehearsal I listened to what they were whistling afterwards, because everybody got a song stuck in their head. That is the biggest compliment. If you've got cats who are playing everybody's music and playing music all the time and you get inside their heads, and they're singing songs after rehearsals, then you know you've got something really special.

**Q** You also just released the "Tuscan Sky" video on YouTube that you shot last month at Tabor Hill Winery in Buchanan. There are a few familiar faces in the video — can you tell me how that came about?

**A** We originally had planned to shoot on Oct. 7 and we got rained out so we had to postpone it until Oct. 9. I had a gig that night but I already had hired a crew to come out and brought in Ed Skjoldal, but my guitarist from the CD couldn't make it. I was trying to think who I could get on

such short notice, and I remembered Marcus Robinson. We hadn't really played together, but about a month earlier he had asked me to guest solo at his show in Chicago. I shot him a note the day before we were going to shoot and he said, "Sure." We showed up at 4 a.m. to capture the hero lighting and just sort of took over Tabor Hill. It was one of those days where it just came together — one of those magic days. Just like the song sort of encompasses my music I think the video also hits at the core of what the music is and the feeling we want people to have when they're listening to this music.

**Q** I know you chose Tabor Hill because you played there a lot when you were just starting out, but it was the Box Factory where you really got your start in this genre. Is that why you've been so loyal to the venue over the years?

**A** For me, the Box Factory is like coming home. When things started to take off for me as more of an instrumentalist I wanted to get together a band that was playing all my music. I didn't care if just five people showed up. I wanted to check it off my music bucket list. So I went to the Box Factory and they said OK. I was hoping a few people would show up, but we packed it with more than 200 people and did a great show. It was such a great feeling. To have that be my first show of my own personal music and people respond to it like that, well, the Box Factory to me is sort of where all that stuff was born from a live perspective. They've always invited us back. It's a great creative space and I think it's the perfect place to see music. You feel like you're in someone's living room having a musical conversation.

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