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## MUSIC

# Pianist On Key With New York Debut

*Musician to promote first album with concert, reception at Steinway Piano Gallery*

By Luann Dallojacono

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When legendary performer Engelbert Humperdinck introduces his music

director to the audience, he praises him on two accounts.

"He's a very accomplished musician. He's also very young," Humperdinck, 73, says, pausing a moment to add jokingly, "which pisses me off."

Queen Latifah, on the other hand, just calls him "Al-Boogie."

At 32 years old, pianist Alex Navarro already has a long list of accomplishments to his name. He played on Carly Simon's Grammy-nominated album "Moonlight Serenade," has recorded and toured with a myriad of world-class artists including Latifah, Rod Stewart and Art Garfunkel, and is music director on Humperdinck's world tour.

This year, he added another rung to his ladder of success: He is now a recording artist promoting the release of his debut album "Closer Than You Think." Navarro will perform with a full band including strings, horns and vocals at a concert and reception at the Steinway & Sons Piano Gallery in Melville at 5 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 21. He will also play a jazz gig at the Northport Tasting Room & Wine Cellar on Friday, Nov. 20 at 8 p.m.

"Almost all musicians will agree that New York is a



**Alex Navarro at the piano before his CD release concert in California. The pianist, who has worked with Queen Latifah, Carly Simon, Rod Stewart and Engelbert Humperdinck, will play at the Steinway Piano Gallery in Melville on Nov. 21 to promote the release of his debut album "Closer Than You Think."**

creative center, definitely for this country if not for the world," said Navarro, who lives in Orange County, Calif. "Every time I'm in New York, I go back to Southern California so energized and inspired, so even though I recorded this project mostly in California, I felt some of the roots of the album growing from New York."

Navarro described the album's sound as instrumental pop fusion with jazz, classical, Latin and world influences. Each of the eight songs has a personal story behind it, which Navarro will share with the audience at his shows.

The song "November," for example, the pianist wrote after his father died, while "Marisol" was influenced by his younger cousin during a return visit to Peru, where

Navarro was born.

"Reconnecting through the eyes of a 4-year-old girl really just opened up my eyes and my heart to my native country," said Navarro, who grew up in Houston, Texas. "I wanted to write something that reflected the innocence of childhood but still had that Latin touch to it." The song incorporates Spanish guitar and Peruvian percussion.

Though Navarro has performed and recorded with several international icons, he said releasing his own music brings with it a different kind of pressure.

"Playing or recording for another artist is a lot of pressure too, and I take that seriously, but it's something else when it's your music, your project, your baby," Navarro

said. "It's made me respect recording artists and touring artists a lot more because I understand now that feeling of hearing something in your mind, and wanting it to come out a very specific way on a recording and wanting it to sound a very specific way live."

Making the album was not without its challenges, particularly given the current economic climate. Navarro, who personally financed the album's production, said he came close to not going through with the project, but his desire to add to the world's catalogue of music coupled with a few "labors of love" from his fellow musicians drove him forward.

"There's something empowering and fulfilling knowing that your music is out there and you've added to the history of music," Navarro said. "I felt a responsibility to myself as an artist, as a musician, to do that."

Navarro kicks off his New York tour at The Bitter End in Greenwich Village next Thursday, Nov. 19, followed by the Nov. 20 gig at the Northport Tasting Room, located at 70 Main St. in

Northport, at 8 p.m. He then plays Saturday, Nov. 21 at the Steinway Piano Gallery in Melville, located at 505 Walt Whitman Rd., at 5 p.m. R.S.V.P. to Steinway at 631-424-0525; tickets are \$10, children under 12 are free.

For more on Navarro, visit [www.alexnavarromusic.com](http://www.alexnavarromusic.com).