

Brian McCoy, examiner.com

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**“Strength and spirit fuel Kurt Ribak's return to music”**

It's been nearly three years since Bay Area bassist-composer [Kurt Ribak's](#) truck was broadsided in [Berkeley](#), resulting in serious injuries that would have silenced the music of a lesser artist. Instead, Ribak met the challenges posed by repeated surgeries and exhaustive rehab to return to the fray. His fourth album as a leader, “I Got One More!” is now available and features 10 Ribak originals and a band that includes Greg Sankovich (keyboards), Lincoln Adler (saxophone), Ross Wilson (trumpet), Alan Hall (drums) and Michaelle Goerlitz (percussion), along with guests Jinx Jones (guitar), Tony Marcus (guitar) and Jeff Cressman (trombone).

There is, despite the trauma that preceded its creation, an indomitable spirit and zest to “I Got One More!”; Ribak even takes a vocal turn on the second track, “My Bald Head.” Ribak will be interviewed at 9 a.m. May 21 by Alisa Clancy on [KCSM's](#) "Morning Cup of [Jazz](#)." A CD release party is set for May 26 at [Yoshi's](#).

Here is my interview with Ribak.

**Question:** In addition to the music, what makes the new album so intriguing are the circumstances from which it sprang. Discuss, if you will, your memories of the accident and your initial frame of mind in the weeks following.

**Ribak:** For better or worse, the accident is indelible in my memory. I was conscious from before the accident until I went under sedation for surgery at Highland Hospital.

June 19, 2012, I was broadsided in Berkeley by a car that ran a stop sign full speed. 10 a.m., clear weather. I saw the car coming and wondered if it would stop. The impact flipped my truck onto its driver side. My window was open and my arm flew out the window as my truck rolled. Although I was belted in and my truck slid a bit with my arm trapped outside.

After the wreck, I was trapped in my truck and I could see the bones in my hand broken and all the flesh, muscle and tendons of my hand and forearm peeled away. I looked away as no good would come of my staring at it further – and I knew I'd never forget that image.

I was cut out of the truck – the accident happened right in front of a fire station, thank goodness – and I was taken to Highland Hospital, where I was Trauma of the Day, the most serious case of the day. I was very scared, I was in pain like I'd never experienced and I was mad to be in this situation and mad that I might not play again.

Even so, I think I wasn't fully aware of how grim the prognosis was prior to a surgeon who tried to break my spirit. I still don't know why she did that. That was as painful as the injury. But I took hope in the fact my nerves were intact. For whatever reason, all my nerves were still functioning. This added to the pain, but also meant if the fingers could be repaired physically, I would be able to use them.

**Question:** I assume there are few things more difficult and frustrating than knowing you have a talent, that you have made a living doing it for years, but now must struggle to regain that level of fulfillment due to an injury. What was that emotional struggle like for you? What impact did the determination to play again have on your recovery process?

**Ribak:** I didn't know if I would regain any use of my hand, much less play, but I decided recovering from this injury would be my mountain to climb, my marathon. This would be my trial by fire, the thing that would test my determination and character. Being a musician is what made the injury so traumatic, but also what enabled me to recover. I probably wouldn't have worked so hard on hand rehab, etc., if I weren't a musician.

I got important advice from some friends in the first couple of weeks after the injury. One person said, "Kurt, the doctors don't know you. They don't know how determined you are. They don't know that as a musician, you have more wiring in your mind and body for your hand and arm than most people do. That can help you recover."

A musician friend who had a serious shoulder injury stuck around late one night to tell me: "The body adapts." Coming from someone else that wouldn't have had the impact it did coming from him. I knew he still plays, despite his troubles.

I've certainly had times I've been down due to the injury. That's normal. But there's a rebellious part of my nature. I wanted to prove the negative surgeon wrong. I've been told I am determined. I persevere. So my nature seems to be suited to dealing with this challenge.

**Question:** A strong and at times playful energy pulses through the new album, particularly on tracks like "Fried Chicken." Walk us through how the album was written and recorded, the challenges and successes alike.

**Ribak:** I had previously scheduled the recording for July 2012. I was having various setbacks and was starting to wonder if the project was cursed. The next day I had my accident. "I Got One More!" is both a milestone in my recovery and my return to the recording project I had to put aside in 2012. A lot of people have asked how the accident had affected my music. For

reasons I don't fully understand my spirit and my music has remained pretty much the same since the accident. Most of the tunes are ones I wrote before my injury, although "Churchy Dread" was written after it. "Prelude to a B Movie" was written for a class assignment when I was in music school. We've played it all these years, but never recorded it. My songwriting and performances have always had playful and (hopefully) humorous elements. That remains, although now there's a defiance and rebellion in the playfulness and humor.

I had to confront some of my biggest fears because of the injury. For me, being happy, being able to laugh, and do the things that give me joy, is the best revenge I can have on my situation.

It was scary doing the recording, though. Going in I didn't know if I'd have the stamina. I simply didn't know if I could spend two full days playing bass. But I'd booked the band and the recording studio, so on I went. And it was fine.

I'm still recovering from the surgery. I've had one major operation since the recording and will have at least one more. I've had about a dozen surgeries total due to the injury. Realistically, I will not regain complete hand function, but I can play again and expect to improve further from where I am now.

**Question:** You have some of the region's top talent on this album. What has your experience told you about the nature of the Bay Area [jazz](#) community?

**Ribak:** That it *is* a community. Greg Sankovich had my back the moment I got hurt. He got stuck with telling my Mom what happened to me after the crash. He and Lincoln were there for me from jump. Everybody on this recording was not only a master musician, but also very helpful and supportive. This was the easiest recording I've ever been involved in. The sessions were relaxed but very productive.

When I got hurt, the jazz community and the musician community in general came out in force to help me – by playing benefits, by visiting me in the hospital and by helping me financially during those first few months, when I had lots of expenses and no income.

There were several other communities, too, that helped, faith communities and people from other parts of my life. I had no idea so many people loved me and cared about me.

What I learned was you need community to heal. You've heard the phrase "It takes a village to raise a child"? Well, it takes community to heal someone.

