

TEACHER JAZZES UP MUSIC SCENE ; SAXOPHONIST HELPS MUSICIANS  
COMMUNICATE THROUGH SONG:[ARUNDEL Edition]

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Abstract (Summary)

Jeff Antoniuk, through his performances, private lessons, summer jazz camps for adults, “master class” ensembles and classes at Towson University, is creating a community of local jazz aficionados, mostly middle-aged folks, professionals and aspiring artists.

For the past eight or nine years, Antoniuk has taken various ensembles into dozens of schools in Washington and surrounding counties in Maryland and Virginia. There, Antoniuk talks about his craft, teaching young children and involving them in his music, said Carol A. Bogash, director of education for the Washington Performing Arts Society, which sponsors the programs.

Full Text

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Jeff Antoniuk stood at the front of the cramped room. With his eyes closed, his hands glided along his tenor saxophone.

He wailed and grooved before stepping aside to let the other members of his quartet, the Jazz Update, add their signatures to the song.

Steve Olson was one of seven of Antoniuk’s students who attended the nighttime gig at 49 West Coffeehouse, Winebar and Gallery. Olson sat near the band, his head and shoulders absently dancing to the tune. The music, he would say later, left him itching to practice his drums.

“Hearing these guys play together is inspiring,” said Olson, a 50- year-old Frederick County resident.

It was, in a sense, the ultimate music lesson.

Antoniuk, through his performances, private lessons, summer jazz camps for adults, “master class” ensembles and classes at Towson University, is creating a community of local jazz aficionados, mostly middle-aged folks, professionals and aspiring artists.

“He created an environment for them to play,” said Dave Ballou, a jazz trumpeter who has played with Antoniuk’s group. “A lot of musicians, a lot of

artists, do their thing and expect people to come to them. ... He's reaching out to people."

Antoniuk, 41, of Annapolis, also regularly visits Washington- area public schools with the Jazz Update and a second group to teach children about the art form.

Earlier this year, too, the Jazz Update released its first compact disc, Here Today, which has scored airtime and a spot on the national jazz charts for months, peaking at No. 25. The CD includes seven original songs composed by Antoniuk, who previously recorded several dozen CDs with other groups.

Antoniuk said he has finally reached a point in his musical career where he can pick and choose when he works rather than following his music across the country.

"For many years, my life happened to me, and that was a cool thing, being a single person," said Antoniuk, who is married and has a 3 1/2 -year-old son. "That was fun and exciting and had fulfilling things to it. But now, I'm more interested in calling the shots."

It's a very different existence from what Antoniuk originally imagined.

"I think what I saw for myself was maybe teaching at some local community college and playing some gigs on the side," he said. "I definitely surpassed a lot of my thoughts and goals and dreams, I guess."

Growing up in Edmonton, Canada, Antoniuk said he had planned to become a physicist, but a year off school before university to study the saxophone, an instrument he first played in the seventh grade, relegated science to the background.

"No one really told me you don't get music out of your system," he said. "It just gets further into your system." In hindsight, he said, he probably would not have been happy with a physics career. After all, it was the scientific big picture - the creation of the universe - that intrigued him, not the minutiae borne of manipulating formulas.

Antoniuk said he realized it was the creativity he loved, and that's where music came in. He enrolled in the University of North Texas' renowned jazz program, earning bachelor's and master's degrees there.

He spent 12 years with the Unified Jazz Ensemble, a group he helped create while at North Texas. The group worked as artists-in- residence for a few years in towns in Iowa and Arkansas before settling in the Washington metropolitan

area - specifically, Annapolis, in Antoniuk's case - about a decade ago.

But after years playing with the same musicians, he said he needed to break away to try out new ideas on his own.

He left the Unified Jazz Ensemble three years ago and courted "the best players in town" to join him in a new group, the Jazz Update. About four years ago, he started teaching at Towson University.

The past several years have also seen the creation of the master classes in Annapolis and Washington, and the summer jazz camp in Montgomery County. Antoniuk said 49 people are enrolled in the master classes; about 90 people attended the camp last year.

Recent gigs have included a Republican fundraiser featuring President Bush and, this week, several visits into Washington-area schools.

Antoniuk is uniquely businesslike in his approach to his craft, said fellow musician Wade Beach.

"He's multitasked," said Beach, pianist for the Jazz Update. "He's able to take care of a lot of business ... and still maintain a high level."

For the past eight or nine years, Antoniuk has taken various ensembles into dozens of schools in Washington and surrounding counties in Maryland and Virginia. There, Antoniuk talks about his craft, teaching young children and involving them in his music, said Carol A. Bogash, director of education for the Washington Performing Arts Society, which sponsors the programs.

During a recent visit to an Arlington County school, she said, about 300 elementary schoolchildren "were absolutely mesmerized for about 50 minutes."

The adult programs, he said, came out of a realization that adult students had little opportunity in the area to learn about playing in a jazz ensemble.

Those who participate learn the art of communicating in a band, said Glenn Spiegel, who has been taking saxophone lessons from Antoniuk for nearly a decade.

"You listen to everyone, and if the bass player wants to change the rhythm and change things up a bit, I, as a soloist will respond," said the 59-year-old Chevy Chase resident, who works as an analyst in the federal Government Accountability Office. "It is tremendously more fun to play with others."