

Jazz Corner:

1, When did you learn how to play the piano?

I'm not sure I've learned, yet. I know that may sound like I'm fishing for compliments but I am nowhere near where I want to be. I feel like I just started. I actually started formal piano lessons (Royal Conservatory, aka, Toronto Conservatory) when I was around 5. My Mom took me out of dance and put me in piano to try and calm me down. I was a very energetic, curious kid - today some people might have labeled me ADD or ADHD. I am thankful though because when you are that age you just absorb the information which was great because I hated to practice. If it were not for my Mother I would have quit - certainly during the teenage years. Now, I find I want to be on the piano all the time but I have less time to get there.

2, What kind of education did you have in playing the piano?

I did grade 10 piano and then went to university to study with a great teacher, Marilyn Engle. I feel very fortunate in that I had really great, patient teachers all the way along. I only wish I had worked a little harder to really implement what they had taught me. After university (graduate degree in Composition) I became more interested in improvisation so that really led me into the world of jazz.

3, What pianists had the greatest influence on you?

To start with, my teachers did and at the university I felt like I was surrounded by amazing pianists. When I started dabbling in jazz I started listening to Bill Evans and completely fell in love with his playing. He is still one of my favorites but I also love McCoy Tyner, Brad Mehldau, David Braided, wow, so many to name...

4, What is it about the piano that interests you?

The piano is an orchestra. You can do pretty much anything on it, in it, with it. It is capable of such expression - the full range of emotion and special effects. You are a horn player on minute and the next minute you are a drummer, a bass player, a guitarist.

5, When did you start composing music?

I remember writing songs when I was 10 or so. I don't know how good they were but they felt amazing to me in that I was able to express something very sincere. Often I would pick up a guitar and write a song playing some pretty basic chords and singing. The lyrics really drove me to write at that point in time although I still have a copy of a 2 part invention that I wrote when I was around 12 (it's not Mozart). Music was my best friend when I was growing up. It seemed to listen to what I had to say. I continued writing through High School and I even remember a great English teacher allowing me to "customize" my assignments to include composing music. i.e. I look back on that and think - wow, what a great teacher! Once I got to university I started writing for more genres and different groups but I still love to write songs. On a couple of tracks on this latest CD, I wrote a song and then removed the lyrics. I was really happy with this and will probably do it again when I write.

6, Are there any tracks on your album that are deeply personal to you?

Everything is deeply personal to me. That's why I do it. However, "I'm Done" is a very special piece for me. I wrote it after my Dad passed away. It came very quickly. Sometimes the songs that are really personal like this one hit you in the stomach like a fist. There was so much emotion in this piece when I first started writing it that I could not get through the first couple of lines without crying. The piece was

all in my head but I could not get it onto the page so I would write one line a day and then I would have to walk away from it. I thought everyone would think about death when they heard it but so many people have told me it can mean so much more. I am really happy for everyone's different interpretations of my words/music.

And why?

Oh, I think I answered that one above.

7, What do you teach and where?

I have taught at one of the most amazing high schools in Calgary for the past 15 years. I taught pretty much everything that was needed or wanted from year to year but more recently I have really "honed in" on the subjects I love most. I have been teaching all music for a while now: choirs, Jazz Bands, jazz combos and some 'one on one' with choral students and jazz instrumentalists. My students have been inspiring, to say the least.

Recently, in a move that I think will allow me to teach (which I love) and write/perform a little more, I have moved to teaching part time in a smaller school.

8, How long have you been teaching?

I taught for around 10 or 15 years privately and for 15 years for the Calgary Public School system. I have just made the move to teach in a private school. It has been a challenging transition to leave an enormous program that I had a hand in building but I know it is the right move for me.

9, Do you feel that today's youth are losing interest in jazz? Or is it the opposite?

I think students may be losing their interest in practicing (thanks to the number of distractions they have in their lives) but I don't know if they are losing their interest in jazz. There are so many things that come so quickly for kids that their ability to focus has really been compromised. As educators and/or parents, I believe we have done this last generation a disservice by allowing them all the distractions instead of helping them follow through on one or two tasks. I have always been a strong supporter of the "delayed gratification" movement - the basic idea of teaching someone the skills of goal setting accomplish something they really want. Something they really want even when they don't want it right now because it conflicts with their favorite television show. Some people see that as being a bit "Old School". I see it as being a "real" educator.

That being said, education has to be fun and where there are interested jazz students you will find (an) amazing teacher(s), for sure. The programs in my city that flourish are all because of the great, charismatic directors that head up these programs. It takes great strength to lead these groups and more and more teachers are battling the "numbers vs. quality" game. I am sympathetic to all parties involved in this challenge.

I don't think I really answered your question - in a nut shell: I think there are as many kids interested in or involved in jazz as there ever was. It has never been about mass adulation and, to some extent, I hope it never will be.

10, What advice would you give aspiring jazz pianists?

Its harder than it looks so you better love it.

Do what moves you.

Imitate everyone until you develop your own style which may take years/decades. Don't worry that this will "stifle your creativity or destroy your style". Most young players start worrying about this long before they even have their own style. Your "voice" in jazz is as unique as a fingerprint so don't worry about trying new or old things.

Transcribe, transcribe, transcribe.

Listen, listen, listen.

(p.s. wish I would listen to my advice more often – it's solid)

All About Jazz:

1, What is the jazz scene in Canada like?

I love our Canadian jazz artists. I have always tried to encourage them to perform in our city and help them, as much as I can, to get here from across the country. I want the world to know that, while I respect the jazz artists from around the world and I recognize this as an American art form, originally, Canada is "a player" and has a voice on the world stage. It is a strong, emotional and thought provoking voice that is not American but can contribute to everyone's better understanding and appreciation of this incredibly diverse art form.

There are some amazing players right here in Alberta. There are amazing players everywhere in Canada: from B.C. to PEI. We (Canadians) just need the opportunity to be heard across the world.

2, Is the media in Canada particularly supportive of jazz and local talent?

The media is as supportive as they can afford to be. It is a tough time for everyone and especially radio. I try to listen to radio but, honestly, that is not often. I try to support local stations but I am not rich and I am not powerful so what kind of an impact can I have? I just keep trying to do my part and then if there are enough little people like me, I guess you can have an effect.

3, How long did it take to you record the album? This album has taken around two to three years. Now I say that because I am also including the writing/rehearsals/planning, etc. on top of a full time job (although I did take a short leave. The writing/arranging took two to three years. The rehearsals took about 2 weeks because trying to get everyone together for 4 or 5 rehearsals can take a long time. The arranging and editing/prior to rehearsals, in discussion with Claire took a couple of months and then "boom" your in the studio and you get it done because the money goes very quickly once you hit "record". We recorded "live" for the most part. I overdubbed the vocals because I wanted a little more control in the mix for these two tunes but otherwise this is a "live" recording. That, of course has some real challenges when you have to sacrifice your great solo for someone else's (I should say Richard Harding's great solo for one of mine) but that is how it goes with this genre. I am not interested in doing a million over-dubs because with every take we did, we lost a little life and that's the thing about jazz – it is about the life and the spontaneity (and all the crap, too). This gives me something to work toward. **What was the process like for you?** I used this record as an opportunity to learn as much as possible. I don't go into any of these without thinking like that. This is just a document of where I am currently. The next one should build on this and this has been built off of "Telegraphy" and "Two Trees" (my last 2 CDs). I had some really great feedback on this one, however, and am so grateful to have worked with Claire Lawrence. He went above and beyond the call of duty from the start in helping me decide which tunes to record. How I

might "capitalize" (hate that word) on the strengths of the tune and what I might do to strengthen other sections. I have wanted to work with Claire for the past 20 years and it was a real privilege to have him on this project. Everyone loved him and his experience was invaluable.

He knows my music very well. He knows what I'm trying to do even if I am not getting it done and he called me to task on absolutely everything. I could not have asked for more from a producer. I only hope I can do another one soon.

4, What songs are you especially proud of on the album?

That is a tricky question because I am pretty close to all of these tunes. That is a little bit like asking which of my 10 kids do I like the most. They all have different personalities and present different aspects of my personality. I love "I'm Done" because it was really for my Father but it is not really pretty. The subject is about the final struggle - coming to terms with the fact that none of us are going to get out of this alive and that at some point we may have to go with it, give up the battle; the ultimate giving up of control. (that's a tough one for me because I like control). "Strange Sun" was written for a student in the school I teach at, well really written for the family of that young person. It means a lot to me because that school was my community for many years and we all lost a lot with this death. By the same token, I love "Counterweight" because it was specifically written to "counter" the heavy feeling of these two tunes and, like a child, it's contribution to the whole is just as significant, if not more but it may never get the respect it deserves because it is not as "heavy".

5, Is there a deeper meaning behind the album title?

Well, yes. I have found that my writing often becomes a bit of a guide for me. Issues that resonate with me often foretell of issues I may be facing but have not acknowledged. I always seem surprised by this despite the fact it has happened this way for many years. I don't always know exactly how to "read" the messages because they mutate (so to speak) and my job is to figure it out. That's why I love writing - it is a direct link to my subconscious and I feel I can better understand myself through my art. I think that's why many artists love their Art. Priority is not as much about the mass adulation or the big paycheck but rather the personal connection. Sometimes you can't stop it, even if you think you want to. Now, I'm not saying that some recognition or money is not of value (everybody like a little validation and money is one of society's ways of recognizing someone/something) but I think this is where it starts for many artists. As well, I think I like the idea of sharing my revelations with others - when I write about my process I am amazed at how many people come up to me after a concert and say things like "how did you know?" Or "why are you writing about my life?" It reminds me of the joys of being human.

The title "Time 4 Change" began as a song. Something was bothering me and millions of people. The market crash and the inhumane behavior of the finance industry makers on Wall Street; The unbelievable greed of Bernie Madoff and the millions of others who have forgotten that their actions impact people and families. "Time 4 Change" actually started with this - or so I thought. I am being completely honest here when I say these issues were in my conscious thought and I had been working on several songs to do with these specific issues, including an ode to Bernie. These songs are not on this CD but will probably be on the next one.. What I found interesting is how this issue became somewhat symbolic for the change I have needed to make in my own life. Asking myself where (not if) have I been greedy, etc. I am always clarifying my own values and asking myself how closely do I live according to my own belief system. Suffice it to say that I feel it is "time 4 change" in my life and now begins the exciting and sometimes painful realization that I am in charge of many aspects of my life (not all) and that I need to implement change in the areas that are not making me happy.

Wow, that was good just writing it out. Always revealing, for sure.