

Q & A with Rex Richardson about His Career

Your Crystal Ball

—***From approximately what age did you think: “I’m going to be a musician for my career”?***
About age 13-14.

—***Has your career taken the path you had envisioned back then?***

To some degree; in many ways I just didn’t know enough to have any clear expectations. I wanted to be a soloist (which is most of what I’ve been doing for the last decade or so); but I also thought I’d be primarily an orchestral player. This changed in the direction of solo work and jazz when I was about nineteen and has stayed in that zone ever since.

Musical Impact

—***Can you briefly describe a live performance you performed in that marked a turning point in your younger musical life (say, under age 25)?***

It was the Catherine Filene Shouse competition at Wolf Trap Farm Park when I was 17. I won the instrumental division, beating violinist Alex Kerr (future concertmaster of the Concertgebouw Orchestra in Amsterdam) and pianist Jennifer Hayghe (who was already touring as concert artist while in high school). This was both shocking and validating; it made me feel like I might have something to offer as a performer.

—***Can you briefly describe a live performance you observed as an audience member that marked a turning point in your younger musical life?***

When I was 16 I saw my first, “biggest” classical music trumpet hero, Maurice André, perform as soloist with the National Symphony at the Kennedy Center. To this day it remains one of the most powerful experiences of my life; I remember being amazed at the fact that Maurice’s playing could make people all around me *weep* during the second movement of the Marcello Concerto. I saw the true power of music and how it could move audiences.

Preparation

—***Do you feel as though your formal musical studies provided you an anchor for your current career?***

To a small degree. I have no formal training in jazz, and didn’t have any real trumpet lessons after the age of 19. For my masters and doctorate, I did learn a lot about pedagogy; but given that I entered graduate school at the ripe old age of 29, having already had years as a touring musician in classical and jazz settings, I didn’t really learn that much about playing that I wasn’t learning “on the job.”

—***Can you remember the one or two most surprising things about being in your career that no one told you, that you had to learn on your own?***

I didn’t realize just how personal the business is...that is, I thought that by becoming a good player and trying to be a decent person, everything would just fall into place. Eventually I realized that having personal relationships with my professional contacts—that is, my friendships with other musicians—were crucially to my finding a niche in the business.

Likes and Dislikes

—What’s the best part of your current, music-related career?

Sharing music with audiences and fellow musicians; that is, the “real thing”—actually being on stage and making music.

—What’s the worst part?

When it feels like a Job (yes, with a “capital J”)—when that happens, I know I’m not connecting, mentally or emotionally, with the aforementioned “real thing.”

Ups and Downs

—Name up to five people who inspired and/or made a pronounced difference in achieving your musical goals—and in a brief phrase, tell why for each. (We’ll take for granted that you have to leave out many, many other deserving names.)

- Joe Henderson, for giving me the opportunity to tour the world with him, and all that entailed in terms of learning and career opportunities.
- Dennis Edelbrock, my most important trumpet teacher, with whom I studied from age 14-18. Without his help, I would not be a music pro today.
- Bill Russo, renowned composer and trombonist, and leader of the Chicago Jazz Ensemble. He showed remarkable faith in my abilities—more than I deserved—in giving me major roles in his ensemble, encouraging me to rise to the challenges.

—Don’t name—but loosely describe—how one or more persons discouraged you from being a musician (or from entering your current music-related career).

My first trumpet teacher, whose primary instrument was guitar and who taught me in a local music store when I lived in Hawaii. He told me I was not musically talented, but that I could play for fun.

Favorite Recordings

—Name up to three, single-CD recordings that you think everyone on earth should own. (Artist, Title, Label would be great....)

- Jan DeGaetani (classical singer) with pianist Gilbert Kalish, *Songs of Charles Ives* (Nonesuch). My single most favorite recording in my collection, purchased in 1988.
- Radiohead, *OK Computer* (Parlophone Records).
- Herbie Hancock, *Maiden Voyage* (Blue Note).

—Name up to three more that simply provide you great personal listening pleasure every time you hear them.

- *The Bird and the Bee* (Metro Blue).
- Jacky Terrasson, *Take This* (Impulse).
- *Michael Brecker* (Impulse).

Parting Thoughts

—If you could give only one sentence of advice to a high school or college student considering a career in music, what would you say?

Dig deep, and don’t look back.

—*And what's the best way someone school-age could prepare to do what you currently do?*

Learn your instrument thoroughly, and start to specialize only when you sense that you *need* to. Strive to master any/all forms of music that you love—but *only* the ones that you love; leave the other genres/settings for other musicians.