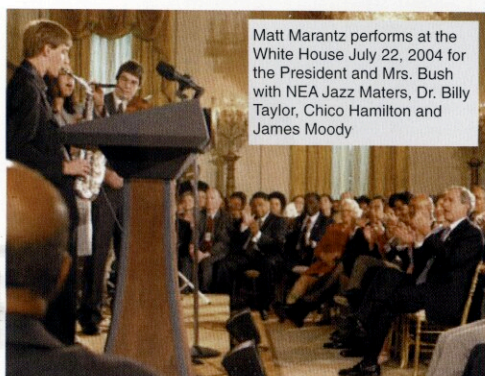


WHAT A RIDE!

By Bart Marantz

Edited By Sara Marantz



From 1980 to 1983 I served as Director of Instrumental Music at a community college in central Florida. However in 1983, under the leadership of a new president, the college decided to close its doors to instrumental music and use that facility for a new nursing program. I called a friend of mine, Willie Thomas, a wonderful jazz trumpet player and educator, who had just recently come to our college as a clinician for our annual jazz festival. I asked him if during his extensive clinician work throughout the U.S. whether he had run across any good jazz programs that had openings. He immediately said he knew of just the perfect match. Willie told me that there was a dynamic program at a high school in Dallas called "Arts Magnet" and that he would be glad to recommend me and put me in touch with the administration there. I phoned the principal, Dr. James O. Gray, and asked if the school had a marching band. He laughed and said "no." I told him I was interested!

My wife and I made the trip over to Dallas from central Florida to interview and spent the day with the school administration. To be honest, as we toured the facility we were a bit surprised at its condition. Our community college had a lovely music building in pristine condition, complete with a new state of the art performance hall. We had traveled a thousand miles to see a school that was obviously quite old and in much need of structural maintenance and updating. As we were leaving to go back to our hotel, Dr. Cornell, who had been the Coordinator of Music from the school's inception, dropped the needle on the school's latest jazz album (then long play vinyl), and after about twenty seconds I asked if I could sign a contract that day! The music was simply amazing and I immediately realized that brick and mortar mean nothing. It's the commitment and desire of students and faculty working together for the good of art that makes Booker T. Washington "Arts Magnet" what it is and has become. We waited for almost two weeks, and I was invited back to become the Jazz Studies Director for the school, beginning in the fall of the '83/'84 school year. Auditions took place during the first week of school in the jazz room #143. This allowed me to size up the larger ensemble for that year and

place musicians in crucial spots, such as lead players and soloists. There were some wonderful musicians auditioning, and I particularly remember Danny O'Brien on trumpet coming into the room to play for me. "What position do you play Danny?" I asked. "I play lead trumpet," he replied. I asked him to play his prepared piece and sat back ready to hear another high school trumpet player play "at" lead trumpet. He took a deep breath and absolutely blew me away. His articulation, consistent note placement, and mature style of hard core swing was something only the finest lead players in the top colleges or pro groups around the country would have demonstrated in this essential and most important position in a big band setting. As he left the room I said "thanks" and closed the door. It was only then, when I was alone, that I started to laugh and jump up and down, knowing that for the next few years I had one of the top lead trumpet players in the country to help direct the jazz ensemble towards dreams even our young students couldn't imagine. Twenty-three years later, Danny O'Brien has two Grammy awards and still plays trumpet as very well as can.

That same year I heard another young trumpet player performing with the Holmes Middle School Jazz Ensemble under the direction of Mr. Dean Hill. As I stood in the rear of the auditorium I could hardly believe my ears. A jazz trumpet player of this caliber is not supposed to exist in eighth grade! This was my first introduction to Roy Hargrove. In that same band was Keith Anderson, alto sax, and Keith Loftis, tenor sax. I went and spoke to all three musicians and asked them to audition for our school. The rest is history. Roy leads the jazz world on trumpet and was voted the world's best jazz trumpet player by the critics of "DownBeat" Magazine just a few years ago. Roy has been nominated for three Grammys and has won two. Keith Anderson was on three Grammy nominated albums last year (2005) and within the last six months has toured with Herbie Hancock, Les McCann, Marcus Miller and Roy Hargrove. Keith Loftis was on the Ray Charles Band, touring the world, before Ray's recent death.

Due to some problems with the program at "Arts," a wonderful jazz trombone player left our program to go back to his home school just before I came on board in 1983. Joe Jackson heard about our new Big Band and came over on a number of occasions to sit in and check out what we were up to now. In a short time he made the decision to return to Arts Magnet, and within a year was winning "DownBeat Student Music Awards" for his wonderful solo work and just-as-incredible arranging. He won the "Young Talent Award" (now the NFAA Arts Recognition and Talent Search) from NAJE, which is now called, IAJE (The International Association for jazz Education) and after graduating from The University of North Texas where he played lead and jazz trombone in the One O'Clock Lab Band he joined Maynard Ferguson's Band. After this stint, he auditioned for and was accepted by the Airmen of Note, one of the nation's top military jazz ensembles stationed in Washington, DC. Joe now leads this prestigious group and is one of those very special musicians who is known for his wonderful jazz work around the world.

In 2004 Joe was asked to lead and clinic the TMEA All-State Jazz Ensemble in San Antonio, Texas. Playing lead alto that year was Matt Marantz. So, on stage was a current Booker T. Washington jazz student, Matt, an alumni leading the band, Joe, and myself in the audience the Director of Jazz Studies at Booker T. Washington, taking in the concert. There were three generations representing Arts Magnet/Booker T. Washington HSPVA at that All-State Jazz concert! In his opening introductions at the final concert in front of over twelve hundred people, Joe had a hard time getting through his comments as he reminisced about his days at "Arts." There were not many other dry eyes at that moment in the audience, including my own, and this will always remain a very special memory for me.

There are many Booker T. "Arts" alumni who have literally changed the music world. Below is a partial listing of some who have come through our school and have made a big difference in the music we all listen to.

Notable Music Alumni:

Roy Hargrove - Trumpet
Norah Jones - Vocal
Erykah Badu - Vocal
Keith Anderson - Sax
Matt Marantz - Sax
Daniel Jones - Keyboards
Alan Emert - Drums - Brave Combo
Danny O'Brien - Trumpet - Brave Combo
Joe Jackson - Trombone - Leader Airmen of Note
Frank LoCrauto - Piano - Pat Martino
Donessa Washington - Vocal - Kirk Whalum
Keith Loftis - Tenor Sax - Ray Charles
Robert Searight - Leader - God's Property
Edie Brickell - Vocal - and New Bohemians
Aaron Comess - Drums - The Spin Doctors
Fred Sanders - Piano - Leaning House Records
Tim Owens - Vocal - Atlantic Records
Eric White - Drums - Reprise Records
Andrew Griffith - Drums - Cedar Walton
John Koen - Cello - Philadelphia Orchestra
Roger Roe - Oboe - Indianapolis Orchestra
Gabriel Sanchez - Piano - Van Cliburn Competition

(This roster by no means contains the names of all of those many alumni who are out in the art world playing and supporting music of all types.)

continued...