

I'm sharing "My Musical Journey" specifically for those young musicians who are dealing with the question of whether they should pursue music as a vocation or an avocation. This is obviously a critical and very individual decision. Hearing about how others have managed to infuse music into their lives will hopefully be helpful to someone.

My musical journey in life started when I was 4 years old. My sister J'Ann, older by 8 years, was taking piano lessons from a charming grey-haired lady who the family called Cousin Ethel. I remember listening to my sister practice on a very small upright piano which allowed me to sit on the floor with my back against the sounding board hearing her practice and feeling the vibrations. It was obvious to me that she was enjoying the lessons, so I insisted that I get lessons as well. Everyone seemed to think I was too young, but I persisted and my mother and Cousin Ethel relented.

Cousin Ethel lived in a stately old house on Maine Street in Quincy, Illinois with her husband Grover and their two daughters, Kathleen and Jeanne. Their work, their house, and their lives were all about music. I learned over time that we, in fact, were distant relatives. My enthusiasm and our distant family relationship led Cousin Ethel to take me on as her youngest student. She did it magnificently. I didn't just sit at the piano. She found countless ways to make the introduction of music so much fun. I even danced to songs she'd play interpreting the music in creative ways. We played all kinds of musical games with her often sitting at the piano, playing select keys and getting me to identify the notes which clearly developed my ear for music. She'd have me work with Kathleen from almost the beginning in what she called "harmony" lessons. It was my opportunity to recognize and write all the notes on the staff which led to chords, scales and all of what is taught in music theory today. It was simply a variety of teaching techniques and subject matter that developed my listening and playing ability and most importantly kept me engaged. My deep appreciation for music educators and the importance of music education comes from the gifts I received from Cousin Ethel. A single great teacher can make a profound difference in a person's life.

Lessons continued until I left for college. Annual recitals were big events – milestones of achievement. And when I look back, there was one other secret ingredient to why my music lessons were successful. My mother came to every lesson over all those years. She was not a musician and could not even carry a tune. But she was always sitting in a comfortable chair in the corner just listening – sometimes knitting – but always present. The combination of Cousin Ethel's teaching creativity and my mother's quiet loving support was the key to my taking music seriously (including practicing) and learning to play well.

Although my training was all classical, I realized in elementary school that I could hear a song and pick out the melody to play on the piano. The years of ear training with Cousin Ethel had an unintended consequence. And so I started learning all types of music which eventually led to playing popular music, rock n roll and jazz. The attraction for me was not just to recreate what I heard, but the opportunity to be creative and develop my own style.

My first job playing music (and getting paid) was when I was in 7th grade at the local Pizza King. The owner, Tom Daly, was nice enough to give me a job Friday and Saturday nights for which I was paid \$4 an hour to play an electric organ. I developed a small but steady following that included a wonderful gentleman by the name of Joe Bonansinga. Joe was special. He was known as "Mr. Quincy" throughout town. He worked at WGEM, the local NBC affiliate, but he seemed to belong to every organization in town. He

was a cheerleader extraordinaire about Quincy and about life. He came to hear me often and he always gave me the same simple words of advice. “Keep playing, Jack. Don’t ever stop!” I’ve grown to realize over all these years how many people deeply regret discontinuing music lessons. I appreciate the many obstacles and distractions that life presents which often come at the cost of learning to play music. But the benefits of music over a lifetime are deeply seeded and cumulative. It’s never too late to renew this love. And if you’re a musician now, don’t stop!

As early as 9th grade, I started playing with small groups in Quincy for weddings, bar mitzvahs, dances, and the like. Once we were playing in a bar down along the Mississippi River. That night it was all about Dixieland. Alan Hunter, a well-known trumpet player in the area, assembled a few older more seasoned musicians and asked me to fill the piano chair. He had charts simply stating the melody and the chord symbols but there wasn’t music for me to sight-read. I knew some of the tunes but admittedly struggled with some that I’d never heard, especially since they were not in the simple keys of C or F or G but in the more difficult keys for piano of B<sup>b</sup>, E<sup>b</sup> and A<sup>b</sup>. At the end of one set, the bass player looked over to me and remarked “You’ve got big ears kid!” I actually do have large ears, but I quickly realized he was commenting on my efforts to listen carefully to the other musicians (especially the bass) to get cues on what to play. The ability to listen intently to other musicians can be learned and is critical in every genre of music, especially jazz. It’s also a lifetime skill that is essential for success no matter what life path one chooses.

My hometown is not large but I have rich memories of being able to hear some incredible musicians when I was growing up. I vividly remember Louis Armstrong and Dave Brubeck Quartet concerts in the gymnasium at Quincy University, and the Count Basie Orchestra at the local bowling alley/restaurant. Excursions to St. Louis allowed me to hear Weather Report, the Woody Herman Orchestra and the Buddy Rich Orchestra. The seeds were planted that a life as a professional musician performing music all the time could be a desirable path. Years later, when I actually “went on the road” for three months with a big band out of Chicago, I realized how difficult life is for traveling musicians. The romanticism of a life touring dissipated quickly. And yet the excitement of performing music really well with extraordinarily gifted musicians has always remained.

The music education system in the Quincy Public Schools was fantastic, at least when I was growing up. It provided so many opportunities for young people to participate and be exposed to music. I tried to do it all: Symphony Orchestra, Band, Jazz Band and Choral Accompaniment. It led to numerous performance opportunities including performing a Bach piano concerto with the Quincy Symphony Orchestra and a debut of a jazz suite which I composed for big band in our “New Faces” concert. But the musical highlight was my getting serious about playing French horn. As a senior, I was selected 1st Chair All State, a distinction I relished. I was almost 1st chair my junior year, but one Chicago high school student slightly edged me out. I vowed not to let that happen again. I practiced incessantly to become the best I could be.

My aspirations turned to becoming a professional horn player in a major symphony orchestra, and I thought I had the “chops”. One summer while at summer music camp at the University of Illinois, I had the privilege of taking a lesson with Dale Clevenger who was principal horn with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO). The brass section of the CSO has always been widely recognized as the best and

most distinctive. And Dale, even back in the late 60s, was a superstar. I will never forget what transpired in that first all important lesson. I proudly played my best for several minutes, after which Dale stopped me and rather brusquely pronounced that I might be able to play 4th horn in some symphony orchestra someday, but that I would never make it to principal horn (i.e., 1st chair). This was pretty shocking and certainly not what I expected from such a great musician. He explained that he could tell that I was struggling in the upper register of the horn (where the principal horn plays), but that I was playing effortlessly in the lower register (where the 4th horn plays). My embouchure was simply better for the lower register. This was shattering news to me, but after about one day of serious self-reflection, I knew that he was right. I had to admit his observation was correct and that I could be pursuing a career with significant limitations which would be enormously frustrating. My desire to play didn't change, but my career aspirations changed the next day to find another musical path.

Interestingly, Joyce and my support of the CSO in recent years has given us the opportunity to reconnect with Dale Clevenger who retired in the spring of 2013 after 47 years as the principal horn player at the CSO (and in my opinion the best horn player ever). When reminded of his sage advice more than 4 decades ago, he asked if everything had worked out okay for me. Of course it did, but in large part because as a music "teacher", he effectively communicated what I needed to know and I listened. Bravo to Dale Clevenger!

During college, I spent a great deal of time with my jazz professor John Sox who played with musicians from Chicago every weekend somewhere in the Midwest. This was a time in which the "big bands" were still hired for concerts, state fairs, ballroom dances. It didn't take long for him to bring me along so that I could make my own connections and play virtually every weekend throughout my 4 years at DePauw University. At the time I had great fun playing for such figures as Bob Hope, Pat Boone, Bobby Vinton, Burl Ives and dozens of other celebrities who used a big band with a pianist for accompaniment.

Unfortunately, big bands are rarely seen or heard today (with the notable exception of Wynton Marsalis and his Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra). But they represented a fascinating chapter in the history of jazz (post World War II). These 4 years of constant playing and improvising cemented my appreciation of the art form and resulted in my learning so much about performing and the interaction with audiences will always be with me.

During my sophomore year, the DePauw University Jazz Ensemble was invited to perform at the Notre Dame Jazz Festival. I think we were among 20 different university jazz ensembles and probably because we were the least experienced, we were first to perform. We played our hearts out and I remember having a few opportunities to solo. By the end of the festival (which was a competition as well), I was shocked to have been selected the Most Outstanding Jazz Pianist. I didn't even realize we were "competing" for recognition as individual musicians. It was so memorable for me because the most encouraging comments came from one of the judges, none other than Roberta Flack, who liked the way I played. She listened. And her kind words inspired me to focus on jazz even more.

It's funny how just a little encouragement along the way can impact a person's life. The positive words she shared gave me a boatload of confidence that my playing was worthy and that at least some people would notice.

Shortly after that Jazz Festival, my professor helped me connect with David Baker at Indiana University who was known then and since as the “dean” of all jazz faculty. I sought him out specifically because he was so effective and well regarded for teaching jazz. On my first lesson, he asked me to play and improvise, so I took a standard “Pennies From Heaven” and did my best. When I finished, he asked what I specifically wanted to accomplish and I responded that I felt I was well rooted in piano technique and music theory, but that I aspired to be a better improviser. His response was very simple. He said that if I could learn Giant Steps by John Coltrane really well, including every transcribed note he actually played in his classic solo, that I would be able to play anything I desired in jazz – a lofty and enticing goal. As I point out in my “Lessons Extracted From Jazz”, my focus on this one task was enlightening as he encouraged me to truly understand the construction of his solo (which he helped me discover could be reduced to a series of patterns) and the beauty of his work. His point was for me not to be intimidated by the creativity and complexity of this most famous tune and solo, but to embrace it and internalize it. Most importantly, he taught me not to let anything in jazz intimidate me. This lesson of not becoming overwhelmed or intimidated by complexity or what you don’t initially understand has frequently come to mind throughout my career and musical pursuits.

There were two times in my life that my father told me “no” with respect to what path I wanted to pursue. Not surprisingly both involved music. The first was during my sophomore year when I was invited to “quit” school and join the Broadway production of the musical “Hair”. The prospect of playing with professional musicians (and making more serious money from my music) was very enticing. But my father reminded me that my draft number was #7 in Quincy, Illinois and that the only reason I wasn’t going into the service was due to the college deferment which was still in place at that time. This was my father’s first “No”!

The second was senior year when I had planned to graduate early and matriculate to the Berklee School in Boston, the preeminent jazz school in the country. I was sure that I wanted to be a studio musician and that this was my path to that opportunity. My father saw a business career in my future and encouraged me to enjoy my last year of college and to focus on getting into graduate business school. This was my father’s second profound use of the word “No”! In retrospect, I now realize he was wise and correct in both cases.

As a result of his direction, I threw my love for music into a rock band we called Wakefield Summit (with four other DePauw students). We had great fun performing for a short period of time and I focused my music composition efforts on this outlet. But we came naturally to a point where we had to decide to pursue this post-graduation or let it pass. This time my father didn’t vote but I declined after thinking through the potential risks and rewards. I’m proud to say one of our band members, Mike Wanchic, moved on to become the guitarist and producer for John Cougar Mellencamp. I admire those who can find how to make music their vocation. But the decision to do so is a very personal decision driven mostly by how passionate you are about performing music.

After business school at the University of Chicago and a few years as a CPA with Arthur Young, I was very fortunate to join The Walt Disney Company in 1981 as the Manager of Management Audit. Nothing particularly musical about this, but Disney being the premier entertainment company appealed to me, not to mention the warmer climates of Florida and California. I found, however, that infusing music into my

life required very deliberate efforts such as church music performances and sing-a-longs at parties. I enjoyed these opportunities to play popular music for others while they sang along. Sing-a-longs are a bit of a dying art I must say. But it was special to me as I could tell that music always brought people together and fueled emotions, particularly joy. Shared experiences around these music moments fill my heart.

The more I shared music with others the more personal fulfillment it brought me. Performing at Disney for cast member events became a tradition for me. Walt Disney World and Disneyland had dozens if not hundreds of extremely talented musicians who found in Disney a way for music to be a vocation. It was a little harder for me. And then in the early 90s, the head of Entertainment at Walt Disney World, Ron Logan, and one of his managers, Doug Strawn, encouraged me to play jazz again after a multi-year hiatus. They invited me to perform one night at the Pleasure Island Jazz Club which I did along with some great Disney jazz musicians. That was the catalyst for me to begin composing again and playing more seriously. And it's led to my now wanting to share my music as I have on this website.

As I advanced in my career to more senior leadership positions at Disney, I increasingly met with groups of employees to talk about the importance of creating a positive and energizing work environment. This led to my thinking more deeply about how effective jazz groups are in working together and how there are many correlations with the non-music world. This led me to develop a series of lectures on leadership, diversity, creativity and innovation, which I shared with the theme park and resort leaders as part of our leadership training programs, as well as numerous convention groups who came to Disney and wanted an entertaining presentation with a theme. (See Lessons Extracted From Jazz in Insights)

After Disney, I enjoyed a decade long run as the President and CEO of NAVTEQ. I was blessed to have a fabulous management team and I found that once again it was possible to bring my music "to work", whether at a holiday party with a sing-along around a piano, at a customer event to provide a unique and entertaining evening together, or continuing with my jazz lecture for employees. Leading at NAVTEQ was simply the highlight of my business career!

In July of 2008, shortly after we closed on the successful sale of NAVTEQ to Nokia, Joyce and I discovered that I had cancer. To fast forward, I am blessed to be and thankful to say that I am a three time cancer survivor (of Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia and Lymphoma) and a successful stem cell transplant recipient. Needless to say, I was surprised to be confronted with such an unexpected and challenging chapter of my life, but I embraced it with the love and support of my friends and family and the excellent care I received from The Mayo Clinic and Northwestern Memorial's Lurie Cancer Center. My purpose in sharing this as part of My Musical Journey is simply to evidence the undeniable power of music in one's life. Not surprisingly, I turned to music as part of my therapy. My challenge pales in comparison to so many others who are suffering daily with significant health challenges greater than my own. This is not something one would normally plan to confront and endure in one's lifetime. But I can attest firsthand to the hope, the solace and the joy that music has provided me and continues to provide.

So, I turned to composing more intensively, hence the album It's Just Me recorded days before my successful stem cell transplant and Jazmin and Mojito recorded since then to express my thoughts and creativity through my compositions. Joyce and I became very interested and involved in supporting Yo-Yo Ma as the Creative Consultant of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra which has been serendipity and has

led to many interesting discussions and activities including an initiative emphasizing the power of music called Citizen Musicianship (see more in Insights). We also became very interested and involved in an initiative at DePauw University in their School of Music to “Create the 21st Century Musician” (see more in Insights). None of this was in our plan the day we learned I had cancer. But music has always been a part of our life in varying degrees, nurtured over time. It is now very much an essential part of our life and our future.

My musical journey is far from over and I look forward to whatever comes next. But I enthusiastically promote the inclusion of music in everyone’s life. It is just what you need, or what someone else needs, when it’s needed most!