

WALT SZYMANSKI

PROFILE

Began his musical journey from a small home on the east side of Detroit that was constantly resonating with the sound of music. Listening to his mother play and sing the Broadway standards on the family piano and hearing the records of Nat Cole, Frank Sinatra, Dizzy Gillespie and Al Hirt as well as the constant refrains of the ever present Motown sound presented him a tremendous musical foundation upon which to build.

The age of seven found Walt as a soprano soloist in the 120 voice, all male choir of St. Raymond in the Archdiocese of Detroit. He made his first professional appearance at that time, singing as well as soloing in front of an audience of 3000 at Ford Auditorium. As the choir began to perform more in orchestral situations, Walt was able to hear the beautiful sonority of the trumpet as it soared above the masses.

His love quickly changed from vocalizing to playing the trumpet and upon entering high school he quickly captured first chair in wind ensemble and orchestra as well as playing lead trumpet in the jazz big band and school pit orchestra. In his senior year of high school, Walt was presented the Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia award for the "Best Jazz Trumpet" in the State of Michigan.

After a brief flirtation with medical studies, and a year of classical trumpet studies at the University of Michigan, Walt transferred to Oakland University in Rochester, Mi., where an emerging Jazz Studies Program under the direction of Marvin "Doc" Holladay seemed to be the direction he wanted to pursue. The jazz program, which drew its faculty from the great jazz musicians staffing Motown records, included trumpet artists Marcus Belgrave and Herbie Williams, saxophonists Sam Sanders and Donald Washington, bassists Ed Pickens and Ali Jackson, pianists Harold McKinney and Johnny Allen and drummers Jimmy Allen and "Pistol" Allen.

At O.U., Walt received first hand experience performing with Jazz greats Clark Terry, Thad Jones, Frank Foster, "Dangerous" Dan Turner, Phil Woods, Joe Farrell and John Clark. It was also during this period that he began to record and tour with many local Detroit acts including Johnny Taylor, the Four Tops, Aretha Franklin, the Temptations, the Dramatics, Wild Cherry and the Brides of Funkenstein. He also co-lead the jazz quintet, IMPACT, which hosted a legendary Detroit Sunday afternoon jam session and worked extensively throughout the mid-west region.

From 1979 through 1982, Walt served as staff arranger, trumpet soloist and vocalist at the Grand Hotel, on Mackinac Island, MI., it was there that he made his first contact with legendary jazz drummer great, J.C. Heard., who was so inspired by Walt's arranging ability

WALT SZYMANSKI

that he hand picked him as music director for his newly formed Duke Ellington Repertory Orchestra, the J.C. Heard Orchestra. The orchestra quickly grew to 13 pieces for which Walt wrote all of the arrangements. His apprenticeship with J.C. found him sharing the stage with one of his greatest idols, Dizzy Gillespie. In addition to Diz, Walt performed in small combo situations with Oscar Peterson, Ray Brown, Milt Hinton, George Shearing, Buddy Tate, Nat Pierce, Buddy DeFranco, Slim Galliard and Joe Bushkin.

Walt, also prolific as a composer (formal studies with Stanley Hollingsworth), served as composer in residence for the Detroit Dance Collective, the Acoustic Arts Ensemble and the Detroit Concert Choir. Additionally, Walt has served as Instructor of Jazz Trumpet, Arranging and Composition Studies at Oakland University (Rochester, MI) 1985-92, as well as the Center for Creative Studies (Detroit, MI) 1988-90.

His numerous artistic awards include 1972 Best Trumpet (State of Michigan Phi Mu Alpha), 1976-77 Arranger and Soloist awards (NAJE, IAJE), 1989-92 Best Trumpet and Best Composer awards (Metro-Times Annual Music Awards), and 1993 Jazz Hall of Fame (Metro-Times Annual Music Awards).

Walt's true love of straight ahead Jazz inspired him to form and co-lead the hard bop group, the Motor City Jazz Quintet in 1982. The group featured the talents of Paul Keller (bass), Scott Petersen (sax), Phil Kelly (pno) and Jon Knust (dms). The MCJQ performed at numerous clubs and concert venues, and also was a perennial favorite at the Detroit / Montreux Jazz Festival. For 10 years, from 1982 to 1992, the quintet performed original compositions and arrangements, always to packed houses and rave reviews.

After the untimely death of J.C. in 1988, Walt knew that he would have to move on if he was to maintain the energy level established through his association with Mr. Heard. This "moving on" meant New York City, the "Big Apple". Establishing residency in New York in 1993, Walt quickly established musical affiliations with Barry Altschul, Kenny Drew Jr., Kirk Lightsey, Cecil McBee, Eddie Hendersen, David Scnitter, and Jimmy Madison.

His first New York jazz group, Emergence; Gene Calderrazo (dms), Tino Derado (pno) and Ted Trimble (bass), featured new compositions inspired by Walt's move to NYC. Soon was performing as an instrumentalist / soloist with the Ray Santos Caribbean Afro Music Experience, the Mingus Big Band, Wayne Andre, Nancy Banks Orchestra and the Jazz Composers Orchestra.

A few of Walt's current musical activities include principal trumpet for the Billy Strayhorn Project, the Cab Calloway Orchestra, co-leader of the Jambalya Brass Band and musical director of George Gee's Make Believe Ballroom Orchestra and Jump Jivin' Wailers.

WALT SZYMANSKI

In 2004 Walt co-produced a CD with legendary arranger/composer Frank Foster entitled "Settin' the Pace" featuring the George Gee Orchestra.

Also a lover and performer of classical music, Walt served as principal trumpet with the Metropolitan Brass Quintet and the Gotham Brass Quintet. He additionally has appeared with the Harlem Festival Orchestra and the Greater Allen Cathedral of New York Orchestra.

In 2001, Walt and two fellow musicians, Alex Harding (bari sax) and Gary Wittner (guitar) formed Trio WAG and were selected to present the music of Louis Armstrong as Jazz Ambassadors for the U.S. State Department and Kennedy Center. As Jazz Ambassadors, the trio found themselves serving as the first cultural exchange group in the Balkans since the onset on civil war in the region. The trio performed numerous concerts and workshop/clinics throughout Serbia, Montenegro and Slovenia. In 2003 they embarked on a second tour taking them to Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Japan.

Two of Walt's main current and exciting projects find him working as musical director / soloist / composer with pianist and songstress Ms. Jo Thompson and the Detroit Jazz Jewels. Originally formed as a quartet, they have appeared at all of the major cabaret / jazz venues in NYC, including the Tavern on the Green, the Supper Club, the Oak Room, Michael's Pub and Eighty Eights. In 1994 they were recipients of the Backstage Award for Best Instrumental/Vocal Group as well as the MAC award.

In 2000, Walt and Jo decided to expand the sound to include the 13 member J.C. Heard Orchestra and have subsequently recorded two albums, "Slender, Tender and Tall" and "Forever Fabulous". They have performed to packed houses and rave reviews at the world famous Blue Note, Iridium and Birdland jazz clubs as well as the Lincoln Center and extensively throughout Japan.

Finally, formed in 2008, Organ Nation is a freewheeling, high energy collective featuring the additional talents of Alex Harding (bari sax), D.D. Jackson (organ) and Brandon Lewis (dms). This group is truly ready to launch upon the scene!

EXPERIENCE

Organ Nation - Soloist/Composer / 2008 —
Grupo Greg Ribot - Soloist / 2006 —
U.S. Dept of State & the Kennedy Center Jazz Ambassador - Trio WAG / 2001 —
Billy Strayhorn - Project Principal Trumpet / 2002 —
Gotham Brass Quintet - Principal Trumpet / 2001 —
Jambalya Brass Band - Lead Trumpet / 1999 —

WALT SZYMANSKI

George Gee & the Jump Jive and Wailers - Music Director/Arranger/Soloist / 1998 —
Ms Jo Thompson & the J.C. Heard Orchestra - MD/Conductor/Composer / 1997 —
Metropolitan Brass Quintet - Principal Trumpet / 1995 — 2000
Jimmy Madison & Friends - Music Director/Composer/Soloist / 1995 — 1999
George Gee & his Make Believe Ballroom Orchestra - Music Director/Soloist / 1995 —
Ray Santo's Caribbean Afro Music Experience - Featured Soloist / 1993 —
Ms Jo Thompson Quartet - Music Director/Soloist / 1993 —
Emergence (Jazz Quartet) - Soloist/Composer / 1993 — 1995
Jimmy Stefanson Latin Jazz Combine - Soloist/Instrumentalist / 1990 — 1992
Detroit Concert Choir - Composer in Residence 1988 — 1992
Acoustic Arts Ensemble - Composer in Residence/Soloist / 1988 — 1992
Detroit Dance Collective - Composer in Residence / 1984 — 1985
The Motor City Jazz Quintet - Music Director/Co-Leader / 1983 —
Detroit Symphony Orchestra Pops - Lead Trumpet / 1983 — 1984
J.C. Heard Orchestra - Music Director/Composer/Arranger/Soloist / 1982 —
The Duke Ellington Orchestra - Instrumentalist / 1979 — 1979
The Grand Hotel Orchestra - Soloist/Arranger/Composer / 1979 — 1982
Paradise Jazz Orchestra - Lead Trumpet/Soloist / 1976 — 1984
IMPACT (Jazz Quintet) - Co Leader/Musical Director/Composer / 1974 — 1982

Professional Associations:

Pistol Allen, Barry Altschul, Ralph Armstrong, Burt Bacharach, Johnnie Bassett, Eddie Bert, Don Braden, Cecil Bridgewater, Ray Brown, Roy Brooks, Lance Bryant, Joey Calderazzo, Gene Calderazzo, Steve Campos, James Carter, Regina Carter, Doc Cheatham, Mike Clark, Rosemary Clooney, Carla Cook, Stanley Cowell, Kenny Cox, Buddy DeFranco, the Dirty Dozen Brass Band, Kenny Drew Jr, Bruce Dunlop, Willard Dyson, Jon Faddis, Joe Fiedler, Frank Foster, Don Friedman, Kenny Garret, John Dizzy Gillespie, Mark Gross, Alex Harding, Eddie Hendesen, Dawn Hampton, Slide Hampton, Alex Harding, Milt Hinton, Marv "Doc" Holladay, Chip Jackson, Duffy Jackson, Howard Johnson, Kurt Joseph, Paul Keller, Brad Leali, Mark Levine, Jed Levy, Victor Lewis, Kirk Lightsey, Jimmy Madison, Cecil McBee, the Mingus Big Band, Sherman Mitchell, Joe Morello, Eddie Palmieri, Nat Pierce, Charlie Persip, Oscar Peterson, Valery Ponomarov, Tito Puente, Vivian Reed, David Schnitter, Gary Schunk, Danny Spencer, Bob Summers, Buddy Tate, Charles Tolliver, Walter White, Gary Wittner, Mike Wolff, John Worley, Earl VanDyke, Earl Van Riper, Mike Vax, Pete Yellin, Wild Cherry, Aretha Franklin, The Four Tops, Eddie Kendricks, the O'Jays, Martha Reeves, David Ruffin, Temptations, Johnnie Taylor, the Brides of Funkenstein, BMI, Local 802 AFM, Harry Fox.

Selected Discography:

WALT SZYMANSKI

Where The Wild Things Are - Warner Brothers - Movie Soundtrack / 2009
Lengua Sin Palabras - Greg Ribot Music - Greg Ribot/ 2009
If Dreams Come True - GJazz Records - George Gee & the Jump Jivin' Wailers / 2007
Fun At The Factory - Duct Tape Music - Trio WAG / 2006
Concrete Jungles - Soundbite Records - Greg Utech / 2006
Spank - Soundbite Records - Greg Utech / 2005
Settin' The Pace - GJazz Records - Frank Foster / Walt Szymanski / George Gee / 2004
Forever Fabulous - Jazz Jewels Records - Jo Thompson/Walt Szymanski / 2004
Slender, Tender & Tall - Panda Digital - Jo Thompson/Walt Szymanski / 2000
Swingin' Away - Swing 46 - George Gee & MBBO / 1999
Buddha Boogie - Swing 46 - George Gee & the Jump Jivin' Wailers / 1999
Swingin' Live - Swing 46 - George Gee & MBBO / 1998
90° With 100% Humidity - Blue Chip - Jimmy Madison & Friends / 1996
Take It or Leave It - Stella - Rick DellaRatta / 1995
All In A Dreams Work - Schoolkids'- Kathy Kosins / 1995
Johnnie Bassett & Blues Insurgents - No Cover - Johnnie Bassett / 1995
Jazz Is - HT - Harvey Thompson / 1994
A Whole Lot Of Thunder - Mijawa - Shawn "Thunder" Wallace / 1991
Open The Doors — Eastlawn — Sun Sounds Orchestra / 1990
Boys Out Late - Audio Visions - The Suspects / 1989
Some Of This / Some Of That - Hiroko - J.C. Heard Orchestra / 1988
Blues On The Road - Corona - Bill Heid / 1987
Dedicacion - Corridor - Lyman Woodard / 1985
Bigger - Omni Arts - Kamau Kenyatta / 1984

EDUCATION

Noter Dame H.S. (Harper Woods, MI)
Suma Cum Laude / 1969 — 1972

University of Michigan (Ann Arbor, MI)
Music Studies / 1972 — 1973

Oakland University (Rochester, MI)
Bachelor of Music with Special Departmental Honors / 1974 — 1987

Trumpet Studies:

Victor Paz / New York, NY / 1994
James Tamburini / Windsor, ONT / 1982 — 84

WALT SZYMANSKI

Vince Penzarella / New York, NY / 1978
Marcus Belgrave / Detroit, MI / 1976 — 88
Herbie Williams / Detroit, MI / 1974 — 90
Bill Knevit / Detroit, MI / 1973 — 75
Clifford Lillya / Ann Arbor, MI / 1972 — 73
Larry Egan / Detroit, MI / 1968 — 72

Composition Studies:

Stanley Hollingsworth / Detroit, MI / 1984 — 88
Johnny Allen / Detroit, MI / 1978 — 79
Ed Nucilli / Detroit, MI / 1976 — 84
Herbie Williams / Detroit, MI / 1974 — 90

Teaching Experience:

The New School (NYC, NY) - Assistant Director/Jazz Orchestra / 2004 — 2005
Turtle Bay Music Conservatory (NYC, NY) - Instructor of Trumpet / 1998 — 2000
Long Island University (Brooklyn, NY) - Special Instructor/Trumpet / 1996 — 1999
Long Island University (Brooklyn, NY) - Ass't Director/Jazz Orchestra / 1994 — 1998
The University of Toledo (Toledo, OH) - Special Instructor/Jazz Trumpet / 1991 — 1992
Center For Creative Studies (Detroit, MI) - Jazz Theory & Trumpet / 1989 — 1991
Oakland University (Rochester, MI) - Ass't Professor of Trumpet / 1984 — 1992
Oakland University (Rochester, MI) - Lecturer/Composition/Arranging / 1984 — 1992

AWARDS

Oakland University Matilda Award - Outstanding Alumni Achievement / 2008
U.S.Department of State / Kennedy Center - Jazz Ambassadors (Trio WAG) / 2003
U.S.Department of State / Kennedy Center - Jazz Ambassadors (Trio WAG) / 2001
Best Instrumental-Vocal Group - the Backstage Awards (Rick DellaRatta) / 1996
Best Instrumental-Vocal Group - the Backstage Awards (Miss Jo Thompson) / 1994
Hall of Fame Inductee - the Metro Times Music Awards (Detroit, MI) / 1993
Best Brass (Trumpet) - the Metro Times Music Awards (Detroit, MI) / 1992
Best Songwriter / Composer - the Metro Times Music Awards (Detroit, MI) / 1992
Best Brass (Trumpet) - the Metro Times Music Awards (Detroit, MI) / 1991
Best Songwriter / Composer - the Metro Times Music Awards (Detroit, MI) / 1990
Best Brass (Trumpet) - the Metro Times Music Awards (Detroit, MI) / 1990
Jazz Finalist - Hennessy Cognac Jazz Search (Detroit, MI) / 1990
Best Songwriter / Composer - the Metro Times Music Awards (Detroit, MI) / 1989
Best Trumpet - the Metro Times Music Awards (Detroit, MI) / 1989

WALT SZYMANSKI

Soloist Award - National Association of Jazz Educators / 1977
Composition /Arranging Award - National Association of Jazz Educators / 1977
Soloist Award - National Association of Jazz Educators / 1976
Best Trumpet Award (State of Michigan) - Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia (Lansing, MI) / 1972

CONTACT INFO

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