

Michael Tracy - Reflections

This won't take long. I can't tell you how much I appreciate your being here and the kind words that Kim shared and the idea that this time has come. This is really appropriate, I thought about this too when I knew that Nick was going to play on this recital/concert. It's ironic that in 1970 when I came here to UofL as a student, I was his age. I didn't play as well as he did but I was here and you might find this interesting now but at that time saxophone was not a welcomed instrument. We had to work really hard to be accepted, to be included in everything that was going on at school. So, it was quite a battle and it was worth it. I really think it was really a great thing to have him to have someone to play well as Nick and all the students on stage as well, it is an incredible experience.

I do need to thank some people and please bare with me because I will not get to do this again. Some of these people you might know and some you might not. First off, I think it is really important to mention my mother and father. They instilled in me a fierce work ethic. A love of music, they had a love of music and anything creative. They never went to college but embraced everyone regardless of their background. They did whatever they could to help my brother and myself. They thought me to think things through to the finish and finish everything I started. To dream big, that everything was possible. My brother was an actor in Evita! on Broadway, so we dreamed big.

I want to thank Fannie Stoll. A name from the past, my first teacher in elementary school. She was an incredible educator. She shared the joy of learning about music and life while building a solid foundation for all of us.

A name some of you might know is Harold Wick. Harold was my band director from the age of 11 years old and was one of the founding members of the Louisville Orchestra. He provided me with significant opportunities at a very early age that were invaluable experiences. One was trusting me to direct the pep band, which was like a jazz band, at the age of 16. I was solely responsible for everything. That was incredible looking back on it. Since high school had very few double reeds, he also transposed all of the oboe and bassoon parts for me, so I got to play in orchestra. So I got the experience playing here that most saxophone players never do.

Another person is Jack Crutcher, my private teacher and member of the Louisville Orchestra, showed me the value of learning all styles of music. He played in the LO, Dixieland bands, Broadway shows, dances, weddings and more. He was working man's musician, able to adapt and enjoy everything he was able to do.

I want to thank John Hoover and Leon Rapier, both professors here at school, because without them I wouldn't be standing here. They encouraged me to come back to school and to teach here.

Jamey Aebersold, my mentor and guide for over fifty years. He introduced me to the vast world of jazz and jazz education. Jamey provided me with opportunities that one could only dream of and I am forever grateful. From my early twenties, Jamey enabled me to interact and work alongside master jazz educators and performers – David Baker, Jerry Coker, Dan Haerle, Rufus Reid, Ed Soph, who is playing with us tonight, all those and many others. It was my opportunity to get a PhD, an invaluable gift. His mantra – Do what is best for the students – became one of my directives.

I need to thank Vadim Arsky. Vadim introduced me to Brazil, it's culture, it's music, which has changed my life and the lives of many others. I will see him and my Brazilian family in a few weeks and we will be able to celebrate once again.

Jerry Coker, my Yoda, the wise one. Jerry shared his wisdom and philosophy freely with me, allowing me into a very special world. His comments and insights continually touch all parts of my life.

Max Baumgardner. Max was one of the kindest, most supportive and non-assuming individuals I have ever known. He always listened, you knew he was listening to you when you spoke. He willingly gave of his time and energy to everyone. He gave freely with no desire for recognition. That was Max. Those who knew Max, they will appreciate that all he wanted when we went out to lunch at Jack Fry's, was to get two scoops of ice cream with the cobbler and we would share it. That was Max. He gave a tremendous gift to the School of Music, to the jazz students and he wanted no recognition. A very special man. For him, he trusted me and I am forever grateful for that trust

All of these are or were great role models. Caring, dedicated educators, supporters of the arts. Good people who all loved to make music, loved to listen to music. Willing to help others find their path. Like any good jazz soloist, I was fortunate to have such amazing guides. I am grateful to the School of Music for enabling me to follow my path through all these years. I encourage you, all of you, to reflect on all of those guides you have had in your life, the people who made a difference and do whatever you can do to help others.

Lake and Jenna, my children. Thank you for being patient with me, for sharing me with others and for staying asleep all those nights when I practiced late at night.

My wife Melissa. It took me a while to find you, sixty years. I kept looking. I finally found you and I am so grateful that I did. Someone who loves me, loves the music I love and who always has my back and has my best interests at heart. I couldn't ask for more.

Finally, thanks to my friend and colleague John La Barbera for writing such an interesting, fun piece we are about to play. Thanks to Kim Lloyd, Chris Fitzgerald, Gabe Evens, Ed Soph and the orchestra for making this all come to life. Thank you very much. Let's make some music.