

Michael Tracy's retirement - Marty Rosen

In 1981 the first edition of a book called "Pocket Changes" was published. Physically, that book was pretty small. At 4 by 6 inches it was just a bit larger than a postcard. But its impact was enormous.

In case there is anyone here tonight that doesn't speak the language of "Jazz," in that vernacular "changes" is shorthand for the chord progressions that guide jazz improvisers through the harmonic structure of a song. And that little book contained the changes to 421 songs, providing a portable core repertoire that any working jazz professional or student could stuff into a gig bag and carry to gigs, jam sessions, lessons, and practice rooms.

A few years later, "Pocket Changes 2" was published. And for subsequent generations of jazz players, those little volumes have become a kind of common hymnal that makes it possible for any and all jazz players, wherever they are, whatever language they speak to conveniently come together to play music on common ground.

It seems very fitting that chronologically the first item on Professor Mike Tracy's CV is a book called "Changes," because across the span of his career, the one constant is that he has been an agent of change.

In the 1970s, he was teaching at Bellarmine University when he noticed that about 20 of the students in his studio were actually UofL School of Music students taking jazz through the Metroversity program. He approached then-Dean Jerry Ball, who brought him on board to teach those students here.

During the 80s he started recruiting students into his ensembles, and started incrementally building a jazz program from scratch while simultaneously building his own career as a scholar, arranger, performer, and educator – a career that though it must have seemed wildly unlikely at the time – would eventually give him a global reputation and change our then-tiny jazz program into one with a truly global presence.

It was in the 1990s that Professor Tracy's passion and infectious enthusiasm began attracting the base of academic and community support (and the all-important contributions) that enabled the School of Music to begin attracting the kind of world-class jazz players, educators, and students who now play such a vital role on the School of Music faculty, and who changed turned our hallways, concert halls, and practice rooms into a joyous mix of sounds where sounds of Palestrina, Bach, Mozart, Joan Tower, and Julian Anderson mix with those of Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, Duke Ellington, Wes Montgomery and more.

And simultaneously he started building toward a change that would create a vibrant and enduring community presence for our jazz program by developing, organizing, and fund-raising to create our annual Jazz Week festival that over the years has become a fixture of Louisville's cultural scene, bringing in jazz luminaries like Dave Brubeck, Elvin Jones, McCoy Tyner, Wynton Marsalis, Marian McPartland, Billy Taylor and many more to not only perform for the public, but work closely with our students.

And of course it must be noted that during the 1990s, Professor Tracy recruited Jamey Aebersold, one of the world's most influential jazz musicians and educators to the faculty of the Jazz Studies Program. A valued relationship that elevated the international profile and reputation of the program. For more than four decades, Professor Tracy was a faculty member and organizer of the world-renowned Jamey Aebersold Summer Jazz Workshops. Which, from 1977 to 2019, brought tens of thousands of musicians as students, teachers, performers and audience members. Professor Tracy also founded the Louisville Jazz Workshop, which served middle and high school students, and now leads the Louisville Summer Jazz Workshop.

Like any great academic program, the success of any jazz studies program hinges on its faculty and much of the program's success goes to Professor Tracy's recruitment of a world class faculty. A process that began in 1991 when he raised funding for a new position and recruited Grammy nominated John La Barbera - trumpeter, arranger and composer - whose resume includes work with the legends Buddy Rich, Buddy DiFranco's Glenn Miller Orchestra.

And of course the other dimension that defines a great program at the University of Louisville is mindful engagement outward to the entire community we serve. And there also Professor Tracy has been untiring in his work. For instance he worked with the Kentucky Lions Eye Foundation to bring Doc Severinsen to Louisville for a 'Jazz for Sight' concert and partnered with Doctors and Lawyers for Kids to organize a fund raising concert featuring Carmen Bradford. He has assisted with founding the Big Rock Jazz Fest and Tyler Park Sunday's in September Jazz Festival.

And though change has been constant in Professor Tracy's career from long before he joined the UofL faculty, he was committed to jazz education. As early at 1970 he was already directing a Jazz-in-the-Schools program for elementary thru high school students in Louisville and across the state.

And of course one consequential thing that any successful academic administrator must do off stage and outside the classroom to build a program is establish the fundamental academic framework for student success - program development. Professor Tracy was instrumental in establishing the program here, developing four undergraduate and two graduate degree programs in jazz. He is also responsible for helping to establish endowments solely dedicated to the study and performance in jazz, one of the largest gifts ever given to the School of Music.

There is one thing that has not changed is that both here at home and abroad, Professor Tracy performs regularly and records – when he can find the time – often with his award winning ensemble, Hora Certa, but just as often with ensembles that he works with in far-flung places. He is much in demand as a jazz ambassador around the globe. He has performed and taught as a Fulbright Specialist, has consulted in two dozen countries on four continents. And everywhere he has gone, from Singapore to Ecuador to Russia, to the Republic of Georgia, to Brazil, to Australia and Estonia, he has built musical bridges with our counterpart music educators around the globe, creating faculty and student exchanges recruiting talented

students, and systematically changing our program into an international crossroads for jazz players and students. And though that sound glamorous, he has also shouldered the enormous amount of background grunt work, like arranging home-hosting for dozens of student and faculty visitors here, and giving UofL faculty and students opportunities to work and play with their counterparts abroad.

For four decades Professor Tracy has been changing our culture and our programming, and always for the better. Now, of course, Mike is retiring – at least in the formal sense. But if his past is prologue, for him being a change agent is the one constant.

And based on that I'd just say to Retirement: "Look out! Mike is coming! And he is very likely to change you..."