

MIKE's Doing Things That Other SAX Players 'ARNDT!'

By CP Christopher Peppas



It's no wonder that Mike Arndt makes his living as a Personal Trainer. And I am sure his clients appreciate the attention the 32-year old gives them when whipping them into shape.

There is another area that garners a laser beam-focus from Arndt. It is playing music, specifically tenor saxophone.

And the one name that peppered the recent interview with Arndt was that of one of the all-time greats, John Coltrane.

Coltrane, it has been said, had more people quit the saxophone than pick it up for fear of never being able to approach his massive mastery of the Selmer Alto VI. But Arndt chose not to cut and run. It was just the opposite.

This is not a clinical obsession, this connection to Coltrane. "I am more so in pursuit of being great at the saxophone," Arndt explained. "I don't care if I make money, I just want to be great. If I get paid for it, it's a plus."

Usually there is a theme, a thread if you will, that connects the subjects of this newsletter and

Getting back to Coltrane, his Giant Steps album as well as Naima, Blue Train and In a Sentimental Mood (with Duke Ellington) are the stuff of legend. 'Trane died in 1967 at the age of forty of liver failure due to Hepatitis C from heroin use throughout his short life.

But his legacy as one of the greatest influences in jazz is not in question.

Coltrane's influence on Arndt is not in question, either. "Giant Steps is a great album, but you can't dance to it," he said.

To fill that void in Arndt's life is the music of keyboardist Chick Corea. "It's just mind-blowing to me the way he improvises. I'm not that good, yet, but I strive to be," Mike added.



When it comes to music you can dance to, Arndt turns his attention to Flamenco music as performed by Paco de Lucia. "That style of music...the articulation is so precise...it has a different feel to it than jazz," Mike said.

Arndt has fed his soul for the last two or three years playing with the Latin Jazz Ensemble at the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music under the direction of Mitch Shiner.

And he has become a regular at various jazz

it's not just music. Most got their taste for jazz whetted by listening to music favored by their parents or grandparents.

"My Dad was into (Frank) Zappa and Pink Floyd," Arndt said. "My Grandpa listened to oldies. I was never into pop music...I hardly ever listen to the radio."

Why the saxophone? "I remember in fourth or fifth grade we were given the opportunity to try all the instruments," Mike said. "I couldn't get a sound out of the brass instruments so I was drawn to the reeds."

Then, in high school, his instructor of the jazz combo at Oconomowoc told him about the Jazz Unlimited High School Scholarships, then held at the Steinway Gallery in Wauwatosa. Arndt doesn't recall whether or not he won, just that it made him want to pursue jazz.



About the author

jams, including the every Tuesday Jazz and Blues jam at Brewtown Eatery hosted by David Miller featuring Jeff Stoll and Joe Zarcone.

"The great thing about playing jazz (at a jam) is getting together with complete strangers," Arndt said. "Half the time, you don't even know the song until they start to play (or sing) it. It's really good ear training."

Mike Arndt made it clear that he kind of likes going out on that tightrope. You don't need any amount of ear training to enjoy Mike's playing.

If you don't hear him at a jam or an ensemble show soon, you will be hearing of him sooner rather than later. Lucky you.

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