



BALTIMORE JAZZ ALLIANCE

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Maryland's Pied Piper of Jazz



PHOTO COURTESY OF JEFF ANTONIUK

Annapolis Reedman Jeff Antoniuk doesn't wait for the phone to ring.

Armed with advanced degrees from the University of North Texas in music performance and West African ethnomusicology, Canadian-born saxophonist Jeff Antoniuk moved to Annapolis in 1996.

Not so unusual, you say? Maybe not—until you consider that until making the move, as Antoniuk admits, he “couldn’t have found Maryland on a map.”

“After graduation, a group of us from North Texas heard about a National Endowment for the Arts ‘rural residency’ grant and we became artists-in-residence in Northeast Iowa and in Arkansas for four years,” recalls Antoniuk, leader of The Jazz Update, a quartet releasing its second CD, *Brotherhood*, this summer.

After the grant ended, Antoniuk (who has worked as a sideman with, among others, Ray Charles, Natalie Cole, Bobby McFerrin and Marcus Miller) and friends decided to move to Annapolis (one of the guys was from Silver Spring “and he knew it was a good area,” Antoniuk says). “I’m from Western Canada and had spent time in Texas, but didn’t know the East Coast.”

A gigging pro with many successful CDs under his belt (The Jazz Update’s *Here Today*, released in 2007, reached number 25 on the national airplay list, with ten weeks in the top 50), Antoniuk, 44, has also staked out a career as an educator. For nearly a decade he has taught jazz saxophone at Towson University and has led workshops throughout the D.C./Baltimore/Annapolis area.

“Adult students wanted to know where they could play in small groups, so I put an adult-student group together, and we all had a gas,” Antoniuk says. “I started Jazz Band Mas-

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The Baltimore Jazz Alliance (BJA) is a grass-roots organization of jazz aficionados, musicians, and venues dedicated to enhancing and promoting jazz in Baltimore and the surrounding areas. New members sharing this passion are always welcome as the BJA continues its efforts to build a stronger and better networked jazz scene. Together we can help this music thrive in the region and reward listeners and musicians alike.

BJA Priorities

- To develop new audiences for jazz
- To strengthen communication within the jazz community
- To improve media relations on behalf of the jazz community
- To bring greater visibility to the entire array of jazz offerings in the Baltimore region
- To provide greater access to performance opportunities for Baltimore-area jazz musicians

Visit www.baltimorejazz.com for information about our accomplishments and future goals.

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questions and comments to:
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Maryland's Pied Piper of Jazz

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terclass six years ago. I was stunned at how many people are dying to do this. We are now up to eight groups that each meet twice a month."

They range from novices and accomplished players who have never improvised, to gigging jazz players. And one thing led to another.

One woman, a flutist, had flown every summer to Jamey Aebersold's summer jazz camp in Kentucky," Antoniuk recalls. "There was nothing like it in the mid-Atlantic, so that's where Maryland Summer Jazz camp came from."

Now in its sixth year and held in Rockville, the camp features workshops with top pros, jam sessions and concerts, all geared to adult amateurs and semi-pros. Another Antoniuk endeavor, inDepth Jazz Clinics, consists of a series of one-day intensive workshops with top pro players and educators.

Antoniuk calls his venture into educating jazz-hungry adults "a bit of a fluke—nothing I had planned. It helps even out making a living. . . . There are big logistics and it required me to become more of a businessman. At a late age, I began to understand music is a business.

"So it's been good when recording a CD or setting up a tour," he continues. "Too many musicians don't put effort into the business side. Some folks can sit and wait for the phone to ring. But for the rest of us, you need to be your own best advocate."

Antoniuk admits he was surprised at the success of The Jazz Update's first recording and looks forward to returning to the studio with the group (Tom Baldwin on bass, Wade Beach on piano and Tony Martucci on drums).

"*Here Today* was up there on the charts with Branford and Pat Metheny," he recalls. "Now it's three years later and I've got a bunch of great music. We'll be recording again this month—*Brotherhood*, which will be released in early summer. It will include some originals of mine and some great standards."

The new CD will be produced and distributed independently.

"Given the current marketplace for music, you really don't need a record company or distribution," Antoniuk says. "I'd love for Verve or Blue Note to call, but I'm happy to do it on my own."

Antoniuk, who flexes his funk side as a long-time member of the ten-piece R&B and funk band Sound Connection, laments the decline of jazz.

"In every city in North America, places to play are drying up," he said. "Even New Year's Eve gigs. Most of my professional friends didn't have one this last New Year's. Thirty years ago, everyone had six- and seven-night-a-week gigs."

That's where being a businessman pays off.

"I do some low-paying gigs because I like to play, along with some good-paying gigs," Antoniuk says. "But teaching and recording help support my family. It's sort of like my day job. Things have changed, so musicians have had to get creative. The only credit I can take is that when an opportunity pops up, I take it. I love working with adult students."

For more on Antoniuk, The Jazz Update and jazz workshops, go to: <http://www.jeffantoniuk.com>.

— By Joe Surkiewicz