

Beyond the Law: Carl Bradford, Jazz Musician

Interview and photos
by Daniel J. Murphy

One of the interesting things about Carl Bradford's deep interest in playing the jazz trumpet is that it comes after a fairly long sabbatical. From his early years as a youngster in Waco, Texas, through his stint playing in a dance band while in the U.S. Navy, the trumpet—and music generally—have maintained a prominent place in Bradford's world.

For a period, however, Bradford's trumpet was put to other uses. "I let my sons take lessons on it and I think the youngest used it to defend himself a few times," he recounted with a laugh. Still, in jazz, as in life, the pause can be as important as the note played. In the 1990s, Bradford reopened his trumpet case and has never looked back. To say that Bradford has been making up for lost time would be an understatement. In addition to playing with jazz bands of various configurations, including Port City Jazz, Bradford also hosts a weekly jazz program on WYAR, 88.3 FM. Bradford, who otherwise is known as a well-regarded justice of the Maine Superior Court, sat down with the Maine Bar Journal to discuss his interests.



MBJ: Please tell our readers about your interest in music.

CB: Well, I've had a lifelong interest in music. I was given a bugle when I was four years old by a neighbor. Within less than a month I was actually playing bugle calls and it sort of stuck with me. Certain music has its influence on me, the way I feel at the time that I'm playing it. I can either go through the motions or I can really get into it. When I get into it, that's when it is really enjoyable for me.

MBJ: The trumpet is your main instrument. What other instruments do you play?

CB: I have a pocket trumpet, two coronets, a flugel horn, and a valve trombone. I won't attest to my ability on all the other instruments.

MBJ: Who are some of your influences for wind instruments?

CB: Of course, there's Louis Armstrong, the master. Maynard Ferguson, Miles

Davis to a certain extent. My friend, mentor and teacher Don Doane, played with Maynard Ferguson. Don is an excellent, outstanding trombone player. He and Maynard traveled together on the road for two years and then Don went with the Woody Herman orchestra. He played with dozens of other big bands. Also, I've got a friend down in San Antonio, Jim Cullum of the Jim Cullum Jazz Band. He is a coronet player and an excellent, excellent musician. On influences, other than the trumpet, there's Jack Teagarden. He was the one that made the trombone a lead instrument.

MBJ: What are some of the attributes that you have observed in great players?

CB: They have an incredible knowledge of music theory and they have the gift of improvisation. When the improvisation is done right—and I'm not saying I ever do it right—but when it's done right, it's essentially a conversation between two or more instrumentalists. They'll take liberty with the chord

structure of a tune and play back and forth between them, as with a conversation.

MBJ: Do you play with others on a regular basis?

CB: Yes, I have a core group that I put together in 1997. The full group is seven pieces, but we also play with either four or five instruments. Besides myself on trumpet and flugel horn, there is Eric Anderson on trombone; Anthony Marro on tenor sax and clarinet. It is usually Peter Merrill on the keyboard and Tom Bucci is our outstanding bass player. On guitar I've got Dave Sutton, and on drums Don Whitney. So sometimes it's like herding cats trying to get all of them set for a certain date and a certain time, but it's a challenge that I happen to enjoy.

MBJ: Take our readers through a typical set list that your group would play.

CB: Well, our set list is really around what I call the jazz standards from the Great American Songbook. You might lead off with a jump tune like They Can't Take That Away From Me, for instance. Then, some of the Ellington tunes, and then go on to Don't Get Around Much Anymore, I Can't Believe That You're In Love With Me, Solitude, Moon Glow, slowing it down a bit. Then, we go back into the jump tunes such as Indeed I Do, and songs of really the 30s and 40s. Some of them go back to the 20s, but I think that the best music that was ever written in the United States was during the 30s and 40s. They withstood the test of time and we are still playing them.

MBJ: Are there any memorable concerts that you've had with your group?

CB: That's a real hard one. I remember one in particular where my friend from San Antonio, Jim Cullum, came up with his jazz band and played for the Portland Symphony Orchestra. He stayed over an extra two nights and played with my band at a venue that we were playing in Yarmouth. That was a real thrill playing with him. He's such a marvelous person and musician. I had hoped that one day I might



get the opportunity to play with Clark Terry. He's my idol. He plays trumpet and flugel horn, and can bend a note with his lips. He can literally play a C scale without pressing any key on the trumpet. He's incredible.

MBJ: Where do you get your inspiration for your playing?

CB: I don't know, since I started this band I have a book that has probably 400 to 500 songs in it. I will look through there just for inspiration until I can hear the tune, and then I will say I think I will use that one on the list for tonight.

MBJ: What is it about music that gives you satisfaction?

CB: One aspect is that I can forget a particularly trying day that I've had, in or out of the court. I also have a program in my computer called Band in a Box. I can pick music in any of the twelve keys, and the program will automatically transpose it using a keyboard, drums, bass and guitar. The program plays strictly chords to back up and I bend the chords. It's like a backup band.

The other aspect is that there have been some really fun and funny times with other musicians. For instance, when you're playing and a guy is taking a solo there is what they call a quote. He may slip in a line out of another tune that is not associated with the song and we'll always laugh amongst ourselves with those. I haven't found anyone around that I don't enjoy playing with. There's just a great common bond. And, of course, we have to keep spreading around the latest musician jokes. It's such an important part of my life and I enjoy it so much.

MBJ: What is the best advice you've ever received?

CB: Jokingly, don't give up your day job. But really, don't let anything interfere with something you love, such as music. I've had accomplished musicians who have a day gig like I do tell me that it becomes their way of releasing all the tension. I was away from it for more than 40 years. I was

in a dance band in the Navy, but I got out of the Navy in the 50s and I didn't do any serious playing at all until the 1990s. But I did get back into it and finally got around to taking some lessons. One of the standing jokes is, "Can you read music?" The answer is, "Yeah, but not enough to interfere with my playing."



Daniel J. Murphy is a shareholder in Bernstein Shur's Litigation Practice Group, where his practice concentrates on commercial and business litigation matters.

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