

Saxophone Today

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Premiere Issue!



Courtney Pine



Greg Banaszak

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Greg Banaszak

Interview By Thomas Erdmann



Greg Banaszak is the true definition of what it means to be a master musician. To say he is a monster on the instrument would be about as much of an understatement as one could ever utter. If you need verification go no further than *The New York Times* who called him, “A Saxophone Tour de Force.”

As a concerto artist with orchestras, recitalist in both solo and chamber settings, as well as at jazz festival appearances, the only continent on the planet Banaszak

hasn't played on is Antarctica. As an orchestral soloist he has performed with the world's best symphonies under the baton of conducting legends like Philippe Entremont, Gerard Schwarz, and Leonard Slatkin, to list just a few, and Banaszak was the first saxophonist to perform and tour as soloist with the Berlin Opera Symphoniker Orchestra, performing the music of American composer David Morgan. As a studio musician Banaszak has performed on movie and television soundtracks for HBO, Lionsgate, and Miramax film studios, as well as for shows on the History and Discovery channels. The future is just as busy. Booked years in advance, upcoming engagements include a solo performance with the Berlin Symphoniker, Cleveland Institute of Music University Circle Wind Ensemble at Severance Hall and in Finland where he has a series of jazz and classical concerts, recitals, club dates, masterclasses, and a performance with the Finnish Radio Orchestra, scheduled for early 2014.

As a student, Banaszak studied at the best schools the world has to offer including earning a Bachelor's degree from the Hartt School of Music “*cum laude*,” a Master's degree from the Chopin Academy of Music in Warsaw, Poland, and an Artist Diploma from the Centre Musical d'Anney in France. With regard to jazz, his background includes time studying with noted artist and pedagogue Jackie McLean. His educational achievements, and Banaszak's obvious musical abilities, have earned him a place on the faculties of the Cleveland Institute of Music, Baldwin-Wallace College and Case Western Reserve University. Among the many honors Banaszak has received include being selected by the European Union's Ministry of Culture and Advisory Board to do a 90-day tour within the European Union, performing in each country's capital city and beyond, as well as celebrating a decade as a voting member for the annual Grammy Awards.

You've been playing Selmer saxophones for decades now. Why do you continue to play them with all of the other saxophone options currently available?

Selmer saxophones are a part of the history of the instrument. I play an array of Selmer manufactured saxophones and I find their longevity in the field makes them a commanding force, not unlike a Mercedes or a Volvo; in all of those cases you're always going to get a quality manufactured product compared to something new on the market. I have also been playing a few horns, a soprano and a tenor, from RS Berkeley, whose CEO is Les Silver. Les is

a friend of mine because I taught a few of his students at Case Western including Marc Plotkin, who is very successful now as an entrepreneur and saxophonist. RS Berkeley horns are copied off of two of Michael Brecker's horns, pristine vintage Mark VI's, which Les has in his possession. Les then took the copies he manufactures and employs modern technology to make them better. You know I'm not opposed to the newer horns out there. There are a lot of new horns out there that are positive and are available for students who not able to afford the flagship Selmer. I think it's a personal choice and it's important the saxophonist feels comfortable with their choice.

I know great players who are on Yanagasawa, and Donald Harrison likes the Selmer that is manufactured here in the United States. It's a positive to have so many instrument manufacturers. I don't know if I would say that about saxophones made out of plastic, but Charlie Parker made a Grafton white plastic alto sound amazing (*Live At Massey Hall*, Debut Records). It's really all about the perspiration you put into practicing. I'm a clinician for Selmer, but I'm really open-minded. Not one instrument is meant for everyone, it's good to have options. Having lived in a communist country where there was only one car to choose from, the desire to try different things is important. I think this all plays into my organic approach to the saxophone. I don't know if we choose the saxophone or it chooses us.

I've always felt that way about music. I didn't choose it, it chose me.

I've been fortunate to spend time playing and conversing with Phil Woods. He said, in a masterclass he gave to my students, "Only go into music if you think you don't have potential in any other field. If music is your only talent, then that is what you should do."

Your recording of the some of the Charlie Parker Bird With Strings arrangements is absolutely beautiful. You've also performed these works with European orchestras as well as with the Cleveland Pops Orchestra and others. You are one of the only

saxophonists, perhaps maybe the only one, who has been able to play both jazz and classical music at an extremely high level. For developing high school and college saxophonists who want to keep their toes in both of these musical ponds, how do you suggest they practice?

I am very excited about the next phase of this project, which is to record the repertoire Bird wanted to pursue. He planned to record these tunes on the next session, but it never came to fruition due to him passing away shortly after his European tours performing the standards with orchestra so many people loved. It was a deep hurt when "they took the strings away from me," as he put it. Jackie McLean, along with Mitch Miller

who was on the session playing oboe/English horn, gave me a list of the tunes he wanted to record, some being his own compositions. This will be the first time many will hear what Bird's dreams of his musical future and aspirations were prior to his demise. It is a great honor for me to record this.

I don't think playing in both styles is meant for everyone, but at the same time it is an essential aspect of our instrument. Darius Milhaud's *The Creation of the World* was influenced by his trip to Harlem, so you have to understand the music of the 1930s in order to really understand how to play Milhaud's piece correctly. This is no different than Ibert's *Concertino da Camera* which is heavily influenced by jazz, and he would be the first to attest to that. In getting into the pedagogical aspects of teaching both styles, everyone will come in with different strengths and weaknesses. I think one of the reasons all of my students are so successful is that I ask where they see themselves in 5 and 10 years. I want to know what their goals are. Do they want to work in a commercial setting?

I have a former student working in the Cirque du Soleil Orchestra, as well as students who want to emulate my mentor Jackie McLean and go the straight bebop route, and so on. Today's students are so advanced, they can take on the idea of playing *Giant Steps* and the Dubois *Concerto*. There is also the Marsalis

Economically I'm sensitive in my teaching to younger students and telling them more than ever, based on global economics, "If you want to make a living in academia, or as a performer, you have to be well versed in several styles." Tim Ries, one of the original members of the Prism Saxophone Quartet, plays with the Rolling Stones. He has also played concertos with the Brooklyn Philharmonic.



(Prototype. Production models in black or white.)

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Strap
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Music Accessories
<http://www.youtube.com/deJacquesMusicalAcc>

Greg Banaszak's Equipment

- **Soprano** - RS Berkeley with a Selmer C* mouthpiece, with a Rovner ligature and traditional #3 Vandoren reeds
- **Soprano** (Classical) - Selmer Series III with a Vandoren SL3 classical mouthpiece, a Vandoren leather Optimum ligature and Vandoren #3 traditional reeds
- **Soprano** (Jazz/Commercial) – Selmer Series III with a Selmer C** S 80 mouthpiece refaced by Eric Greiffenhagen of Springfield, Ohio with a Rovner Versa X ligature and Vandoren #3 traditional reeds.
- **Alto** (Classical) - Selmer Mark VI serial number 118,xxx or an RS Berkeley Virtuoso unlacquered model with a Vandoren AL4 mouthpiece, a Vandoren leather Optimum ligature and Vandoren #3 traditional reeds, or a Selmer C* S80 circa 1980's, with a Rovner Versa Ligature, a Vandoren AL4 mouthpiece and Vandoren #3 traditional reeds
- **Alto** (Jazz/Commercial) - Selmer Mark VI serial number 118,xxx or an RS Berkeley Virtuoso unlacquered model with a Meyer #5 New York mouthpiece circa 1950's customized by Phil Barone, NY, or a Meyer #6 mouthpiece circa 1950's customized by Ralph Morgan, Springfield, Ohio, or a Vandoren A 45 Jumbo Java mouthpiece, with a leather Optimum ligature and #3 Vandoren Jazz Reeds
- **Tenor** (Classical) - Selmer Model 22 serial no. 1466, or a Selmer Serie III, or a RS Berkeley Virtuoso Sterling Silver Model, a Vandoren TL3 mouthpiece with a leather Optimum ligature and #3 traditional Vandoren reeds
- **Tenor** (Jazz/Commercial) - Selmer Model 22 serial no. 1466, or a Selmer Serie III, or a RS Berkeley Virtuoso Sterling Silver Model, a T55 Vandoren Java mouthpiece, a leather Optimum ligature and #3 Vandoren Jazz reeds, or a Vandoren V16 Series T8 Ebonite mouthpiece with a leather Optimum ligature and #2½ Vandoren Jazz reeds
- **Baritone** (Classical) - Selmer Mark VI with a low B-flat (no low A), a Vandoren BL3 mouthpiece with a Vandoren Leather Optimum ligature and #3 Vandoren traditional reeds
- **Repair Technicians** – Mr. Gary Byndas, Educators Music, Lakewood, Ohio and Mr. Ed Diefes, Diefes Musical Instrument Repair, Marcellus, New York
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family, who have played in both styles very successfully. I learned so much from Branford, who has done classical recordings, when I interviewed him for *Saxophone Journal*. He travels so much. I asked him how he stays in shape with all the touring and with his family commitments. He said he gets up at 5 a.m. in order to get done everything he needs to do. I try to embrace ideas like that as I have found my career to have many of those same elements.

Then I look at someone like Benny Goodman who was playing the Copland *Clarinet Concerto* during the day and swing with Lionel Hampton at night. Art Tatum was able to do everything by ear, including quoting Mahler symphonies

in his playing. Playing in both styles is happening more and more, but you have to have the discipline to address aspects of both styles on a daily basis, and that's where people fall short. A lot of professionals think they can put on a C* mouthpiece and play with an orchestra, and then when they have to play low register sub-tone notes they're not in tune. It's not about the equipment, it's about a daily study of each style.

There are also jazz players who have intonation issues. It's really about managing both styles, and what I suggest doing is addressing both. In the morning, for example, I might brush my teeth and play the first movement of the Ibert for 15 minutes. Then I might go to rhythm changes or the blues in an arduous key, playing slowly and methodically. I do this every day. I believe this has paid off for me. Addressing one's weaknesses, which we don't like to do, has to be done because in the long run it gives us strength and longevity in trying to balance playing jazz and classical music.

Economically I'm sensitive in my teaching to younger students and telling them more than ever, based on global economics, "If you want to make a living in academia, or as a performer, you have to be well versed in several styles." Tim Ries, one of the original members of the Prism Saxophone Quartet, plays with the Rolling Stones. He has also played concertos with the Brooklyn Philharmonic.

Your recording of Ray Ricker's Solar Chariots on your Double Vision CD is incredible. The evenness of tone you have throughout the soprano saxophone's range is remarkable. How do you work to get that amazing tonal fluency on the soprano?

I never found myself playing soprano sax, per se. I've always heard the alto in my ears, even when playing the soprano. Phil Woods was the first saxophonist I ever heard. I didn't even know what instrument it was when I first heard him play. My mother wanted me to play an instrument and I didn't see myself as a guitarist, drummer or bass player. When I heard Phil's saxophone solo on Billy Joel's *Just The Way You Are*, I said, "Whatever instrument that is, that's what I want to play." I still thank him for that, which he gets a kick out of.

As I went on in my studies I began to really embrace the violin repertoire. I probably study more string music than the average saxophonist. I've always heard, in my mind, the soprano played with a very even tonal scale like when Joshua Heifetz or any of the great violinists perform, and I still do. To help me with this, and regardless of the genre, I'll transcribe and do long tone studies on all literature, not just jazz, but also Bach solo *Partitas* and *Sonatas*. I want to embrace that sound. When I was in North Carolina soloing with the Eastern Music Festival Orchestra the string players wanted to know why I had such a big sound. I said, "Name a Bach *Partita*." They did, and I played it. Then I told them to name one of their favorite string artists, they did, and then I played that same piece in the style of that artist. I matched their vibrato, articulation, nuances, etc. *I don't know what they could be. I didn't hear any.*

I appreciate that. I didn't realize it at the time, but that recording was an adventurous undertaking. To record on

three different saxophones in a matter of a few days was difficult. I don't know if I could do that again, and I don't know if I would want to. It was, however, a labor of love. It was recorded at Cornell's Bailey Hall Auditorium, which is circular, and I believe the only one in this country that is circular.

You recorded Eugene Bozza's Aria on your Romances CD, and you also recorded Rachmaninoff's Vocalise on your Saxophone Concertos CD. Both pieces place your lyrical abilities out front in a marvelous manner. The thing that really unites these two recordings, in my opinion, is your amazing breath control. The Vocalise in particular reminded me of Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg's amazing performances of the work. How do you suggest saxophonists work on breath control in order to develop their abilities to play pieces like these as flawlessly and musically as you do?

You hit the nail on the head, Ms. Sonnenberg is a wonderful violinist, and to understand her you have to understand who she admires. Personally I go to the recording of Anna Moffo. Her recording is even more amazing when we realize that at the time she recorded that piece they could not edit the performance, so what you hear is what she did in live time. This might be a simplified answer, but to play along with that recording, five times in a row, you quickly realize what you have to do as a player in order to make those phrases happen. You don't hear her gasping for air. It sounds like she is in a state of grace. You know she learned I had recorded the *Vocalise* and that I had cited her as a big influence on my playing. From this she invited me to some dinner parties. Do you know when she threw a dinner party she would spend three days cooking everything? They were amazing parties, and she was so personable.

I have to admit I'm really drawn to and love your interpretation of the Glazunov Concerto on your Saxophone Concertos CD. I feel you approach the piece with a much greater sense of the poetic and emotional than other saxophonists. How do you suggest your students approach this piece?

This is our tour-de-force piece. When speaking to conductors on a global basis, they may know the Dubois, the Ibert, a new piece by John Adams recently done by Tim McAllister, but for us saxophonists it's all about the Glazunov. As a side note, because of the economics of recording with foreign orchestras I usually only get one take at recording on each piece. This is due to budget constraints and working with Eastern European orchestras. At the time I recorded this work it was cheaper to record over there, but now it's completely changed. There is enough drama in the piece that I think it should be played delicately. I've studied his other repertoire including his string quartets and nine symphonies. Every saxophonist reading this article knows of the Glazunov *Concerto*, but do they know of his other works. Michael Tilson Thomas recently received a Grammy for his recording of Glazunov's *Ninth Symphony*. Do saxophonists know who Glazunov's influences were, like Rimsky-Korsakov, his protégé Dimitri Shostakovich, etc.? This all goes into understanding the music.

The Glazunov also has a number of tricky and fast finger combinations that result from nothing other than the beauti-

ful arrangement of notes Glazunov writes. Is it just slow and steady practice wins the race, or are there some other suggestions you can offer developing saxophonists who are confronted by thorny finger work?

Getting with a teacher that has actively performed the work and understands what it's like to play with an orchestra is important. The saxophone in an academic setting is unique. There are many saxophone professors who have yet to play with a professional orchestra, yet they are teaching students to teach other students. They do the opposite of what I did. My last year as an undergraduate I knew I had to play all the time, and it didn't matter if it was at a church venue, a club date, etc. It's in my DNA to play. You have to find a teacher who really understands the piece. I went to Vincent Abato to help me learn the piece. When he recorded the piece he had only 14 days preparation, receiving the music very shortly before the recording session because a little more money was freed up by his record company in order to record one more piece. The Glazunov was chosen. He learned the Glazunov at the last minute so he could record it along with the Ibert. Getting together with him was important.

It's not exciting to practice this way, but you have to take some of those passages very slowly and methodically with a metronome. If you want to be in shape you can't get away from the basics.

For me, I really wanted to learn the piece from someone who had done it. After my graduate work I was living in Hartford, Conn., and I would drive three hours one way to study with Vincent Abato. Our lessons had to be at nine in the morning. I didn't want to do that. After our studies were completed it became obvious the reason he had our lessons at 9 a.m. was because he was trying to teach me that if you really want to have a career like the one I have now, you have to sound good all the time, including nine a.m. All around the world batons go down at nine in the morning.

You have recorded a number of times in chamber music settings, including the Neo-Ragtime CD of Brian Dykstra's compositions, and the extraordinary Duo Concertos for Alto Saxophone, Flute and Orchestra CD. When playing in these duo chamber settings with flute, did you find you had to approach playing the saxophone differently than you normally do?

No, you still have to be a soloist but not one with an attitude, but you also have to blend. I have done a lot of study of great flute players. For example, I want to sound like William Bennett's great low register on my low register, and I wanted to sound like this even before I started working with any flutist. It's really interesting, because to record that specific CD the flutist was by the first violin section and I was by the cello section. We were separated by 25 feet for recording purposes. We rehearsed that way as well, and it didn't hurt that the flutist was my wife.

Another composer who is a great saxophone composer, who 100 years from now may be as well-known as Glazunov, is David Morgan. He is one of the most exceptional composers I've ever come across. He writes so many wonderful pieces that capture styles and essences. He can take you to the Middle East and then in the next bar he can take

you to the 1920s. He is prolific, yet modest and humble, and on top of that he's a world-class bassist who has played with Joe Lovano and other A-list jazz artists.

Getting back to the blend of saxophone and flute, you have to understand the demands of orchestral wind players and the nuances of each instrument. Plus knowing that if something is ever wrong with the orchestra, on pieces like *Lt. Kije* or Ravel's *Bolero* or *Pictures At An Exhibition*, it is never anyone's error other than the saxophonist's. You also have to be at A=440, if that is where they tune, and it has to be tattooed on your ear along with every subtly and nuance.

I remember playing *Bolero* in the Dominican Republic with conductor Phillippe Entremont, with his age, lineage and approach to the piece the work was done very slowly. Everything had to be ultra-quiet. I've also played with the Cleveland Orchestra off and on several times, and I know what the demands of that orchestra are. When you're playing in the orchestral world you have to live within the same musical parameters of any other wind player. That poses problems with a conical bored instrument and you have to understand the repertoire. Just putting on a classical mouthpiece, like a Vandoren or a Selmer, that is just half the battle. This may be the first time people will learn that Vincent Abato sounded so good on a NY Meyer 5. That was what he used, the same mouthpiece that Cannonball Ad-derley used.

Speaking of Abato, I understand he was misquoted regarding Charlie Parker.

That's true. He told me, before he passed away, he was misquoted in Michael Segell's book, *The Devil's Horn*. He was quoted as saying he disliked Parker's sound, but that's not correct. It wasn't that Vincent Abato disliked Parker's sound, it was that Parker actually came to Abato asking how he could sound as sweet as Abato did. Parker wanted to have more vibrato in his sound, as well as sound sweeter, when playing ballads. At the time Parker did not like his dry sound and came to Abato to try and improve. Abato told me this 10 days before he died. He had felt bad about it ever since the misquote was published. I know he wanted this cleared up. When he saw the book he was upset, for lack of a better term, that he was misquoted.

I was able to interview saxophonist and composer Russell Peterson a few years ago and found him to be not only a great composer and performer, but also, like yourself, extremely knowledgeable. You asked him to score his Trio for Alto Saxophone, Flute and Piano for string orchestra, and then you recorded it on your Duo Concertos CD. What drew you to asking him to make that transcription?

I heard that composition in that genre, the string or- chestral genre. I'm doing more and more work, myself, in trying to see where I see myself in 10 years, and I'm doing more and more work in film studios, both in Europe and Los Angeles. When I approach a new piece, such as Russ', who is such a great musician and person, I heard the work not only as a piece that would be great for an orchestral setting but I also heard it as a piece that would work well in the current film genre, specifically in some type of crime drama. When I make CDs now I not only market them for

the general saxophone audience or people interested in the saxophone, but also for those I know at Lionsgate Films and others in the film world I know and have worked with. Once or twice a year I find myself doing some arranging or ghostwriting for films. They are not all A-list films, but there are so many films released.

This is just another reason to do more great pieces and find more great composers to continue this process. I've been recording a lot of film music lately and I've been hired because, as you alluded to with regard to my soprano saxophone playing, they want someone who can play the saxophone in the same manner as when they want a great English horn player. When they hire English hornist Tom Stacey they know he can make people cry with the sound of his instrument. If that is what producers of film sound- tracks want, a certain sound, they call me, and I've re- ally enjoyed do this playing. Three times a year, January, March and May, are the target seasons to promote and discuss these things with the Hollywood team.

One of the things saxophonists find themselves almost im- mediately doing once they arrive at college is playing in duo with a pianist. Many times this is something they have rarely, if ever, previously done in their life. Your performance of the Koch Suite for Alto Saxophone and Piano on the Koch Contrasts CD should be required listening for all develop- ing musicians to hear how artfully the duo recital situation with piano can be accomplished. How do you council your students to create the great interplay you've created when working on this piece?

I think it all comes down to embracing some positive dissonance. Ironically Fred Koch was Sigurd Rascher's ac- companist for many years, so he understood the saxophone intimately. He liked to embrace large intervals and disso- nances and put them together, like major 7ths. Also being heavily influenced by Aaron Copland, Koch was subtly atonal and embraced that in his compositions. This can be one of the first musical examples, in an organic way, of what might be really spicy to someone who might be used to standard American affair music. For young students this minor atonality, while it might not be Stravinsky, still brings forth subtleties that can introduce the student to things like the beauty of a D and an E-flat sounding at the same time.

For those who are just beginning to play with piano ac- companiment, how do you council to help them in this duo situation?

Intonation, intonation, intonation. That statement is interesting in itself. All pianos are not tuned to A=440. Some are in the state of going flat. You have to adjust to a tempered scale with a conical bore instrument, which cre- ates a lot of issues. Playing with the tuner and having that dial right on zero and then making sure the light is green and not red, and knowing your instrument and making sure it functions for you, is absolutely essential.

The positive rapport you establish with your pianist is also important. You have to look at them and not just the music. I suggest having the music memorized so you can engage your pianist. They should do a study and look at some of the greatest duos and how they interact. How did

Greg Banaszak's Website

<http://www.gregbanaszak.com/>

Greg Banaszak's CDs Available On Amazon

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1,351 views on YouTube

"A song not Sung" for saxophone and string orchestra.

Opera i Filharmonia Podlaska Europejskie Centrum Sztuki/
The Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic European Art Centre.

Orkiestra Opery i Filharmonii Podlaskiej

The Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic Orchestra.

Piotr Borkowski - dyrygent/conductor.

Greg Banaszak - saksofon/saxophone.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Os3EPdCfC7U>

812 views on YouTube

"Trinity Concerto" for alto saxophone and string orchestra, 2nd Movement.

Opera i Filharmonia Podlaska Europejskie Centrum Sztuki/
The Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic European Art Centre.

Orkiestra Opery i Filharmonii Podlaskiej/The Podlasie

Opera and Philharmonic Orchestra.

Piotr Borkowski - dyrygent/conductor.

Greg Banaszak - saksofon/saxophone.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m4l3WORXbhM>

992 views on YouTube

D. Morgan - "Reflections and Meditations" for flute, alto saxophone, percussion and string orchestra, 1st Movement.

Opera i Filharmonia Podlaska Europejskie Centrum Sztuki/
The Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic European Art Centre.

Orkiestra Opery i Filharmonii Podlaskiej/The Podlasie

Opera and Philharmonic Orchestra.

Piotr Borkowski - dyrygent/conductor.

Greg Banaszak - saksofon/saxophone.

Katherine DeJongh - flet/flute.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2a3NKOg8DI>

Heifetz interact with his pianist, how does Joshua Bell interact with his pianist? It's not just two people, there is a musical conversation happening.

I encourage my younger students to have this happen right away, even if there are wrong notes. I want them to know it's more important to create important music. We can fix an A-flat into an A-natural. I'll tell them, when it's not going well for them, that they don't know the color of their pianist's eyes. I tell them to not look at the notes, they need to know what the color of their pianist's eyes are. If they don't know, I tell them this is the place where they need to start. They should also take their pianist out for coffee and have a conversation. Music isn't just made between 1 and 1:50 p.m. Music is created because we are social beings and it's important to embrace that.

You play some very loud passages artfully on the Peterson composition, including altissimo notes in the Second Movement. Playing at an advanced loud dynamic level, are you specifically doing something with your mouth's air chamber or embouchure in order to keep the sound from crimping?

Not really. I believe the stereotypical Larry Teal handbook (one embouchure fits all) that I was taught from Daniel Deffayet and Vincent Abato and the great player from Buffalo like David Schiavone is the best way to go. When you're taught early on that one embouchure will do all you need it to do, and that this is very important, well you quickly learn that this is the biggest aspect we as teachers can teach. It's not the quality of the fingers, it's the concept of embouchure that is important. Sure, there may be issues and problems to work on, but a bad habit that is instilled for too long can take a long time to fix.

We can all thank Lenny Pickett for showing us the extremes of the tenor saxophone, when done with grace, elegance and passion, but in my situation it was all about keeping the sonority the same; taking it slowly and methodically through the practicing. Then you have to enjoy the process. When Russ first gave me that piece I was scratching my head trying to figure out how to do this, but I had heard him do it so I knew it was possible. With the orchestra we had to slow the piece down a little bit because getting 60 string players to play at that velocity as opposed to just a trio with piano was a little different. If anything is done once it can always be emulated. That's how I look at it.

Trinity Concerto by Pawel Lukaszewski is on your Duo Concertos CD and on the composer's Musica Sacra 1 CD. He composed this piece for you and dedicated it to you. How did you come to meet him and how much input were you given to the compositional process?

He's a composer who resides both in Warsaw and in London. I didn't have much interaction with him as he was composing the piece. Basically, he heard my sound. He wasn't interested in technique, but the first time he heard the saxophone played sweetly and with a vocal type lyrical approach he was led to want to write this concerto. It's actually the opposite of standard concerto form because the first and third movements are slow and the second movement is fast in a style almost like Philip Glass' minimalism. That third movement has a tempo of quarter note equal-

ing 30, and that posed problems. He wrote the piece, I was given the manuscript, and I had to play it. I didn't know what I was going to come across.

Maestro Pendereski is working on a concerto based on the idea I had because of all my relations with Polish composers, arts and culture. I didn't want a piece that was so busy with the saxophone. I told him if he wants to proceed with the piece to write it for full choir, full orchestra, and just have solo alto saxophone function like the flute in Faure's *Pavane*. He had asked me what my concept was, and this led to a three to four hour conversation because his wife is the Artistic Director of the Beethoven Academy Orchestra in Krakow which I performed with on my double CD, so we already had a positive relationship. I was delighted he would even consider writing something in his career for saxophone. Later on I told him that if he was really going to do this I would prefer he write it for full orchestra, full choir, and have the saxophone cascade over the 200 voices. That will be my next CD. Pawel has also written another piece for this upcoming CD that is wonderful with

great percussion parts. Then this one solo voice comes in that is going to be the saxophone. I'm getting ready for that as well as being booked into 2016. None of this is ever a dull process.

You were the producer of fellow saxophonist Alan Durst's CD, Tangos y Serenatas (Centaur, 2008). What led you to undertake the role of a producer instead of being on the front side of the microphone?

I think it is the natural evolution of being someone who loves film, and I'm actually getting into some bit part roles and things like that as well. A few of my friends are great saxophonists and great actors. There is Alan Wasserman who is on different CSI dramas and Ethan Philips who was on *Star Trek Voyager*. They are classically trained actors and great saxophone players. Being a producer is the same aspect a lot of great saxophonists, including Branford Marsalis, have undertaken. It seems like the natural evolution if you keep recording that eventually you'll want to produce. My next CD has me producing a solo oboe CD by Courtney Miller.

Sometimes people don't even know I'm a saxophonist because they only interact with me as a producer. They don't know me as someone other than a person who was hired to go there and record to make sure everything is 110 percent. My musical partner in crime is a wonderful recording engineer, Sunny Ausman, who he is the Second Trombonist with the L.A. Philharmonic, but he also records the L.A. Philharmonic and the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra. He is a veteran recording engineer. I also know I can't musically overreach as a producer so I only take on about two of these projects a year because if I take on more than the year is gone.

You were the first and only saxophonist to live and study in a communist Eastern bloc country, with your studies in Poland.

It was a wonderful experience, but both the best and worst of times. George Bush Sr. was head of the CIA, Vladimir Putin was head of the KGB. All of those people, and others, had to sign off on allowing me to study there. There were several times when I was going through East Germany when I was falsely told my documents weren't in order, as well as in Warsaw, so I would be periodically detained for two days or more. There are people who have asked me to write books on my experience, and someone from the USA Television Network asked me to do a short film on my experiences. The producer who wanted to do it has retired now, but he's from Cleveland, and I told him, "You want to do a 90-minute, minus commercials, film. How can you capture everything that I went through, those two years of my life studying in a country on the edge of collapse after fifty years of Soviet control in 38 or 42 minutes? It's not worth it." Only in the past couple of years have I been discussing doing this project. I don't think I would have the success I have, especially throughout Europe, and especially with regard to the affinity I have for Warsaw, if I had not gone to school there and lived there during that time in history.

There is also the issue of freedom. You don't realize what we have here in the United States until you lose it. We have freedoms we take for granted, and they are really special.

I can't keep playing forever, neither can anyone else, so it's important to do what you love and make good music. You also have to do what you believe in. If someone tells you, like they told me, you'll never be able to play classical saxophone, that's silly. I just listened to Vincent Abato's recordings and I thought, "Why not play classical saxophone?" I was never taught you had to earn three degrees and then go teach 60 students a week and play a once a year recital and worry about tenure. I never understood that. I thought, "Why can't I have a career like a pianist or violinist." I embraced studying and working with other players who were already doing that, having a performance career.

What advice do you have for high school saxophonists who want to make music a career?

Younger players, as well as college students who are still figuring things out, should realize it's a great career. There are some people in this country who will tell you to go into something stable. There is really nothing stable. Go with something you love. Make sure you get with a quality teacher who knows what's going on, this is paramount.

I just can't say enough about what I learned from all my mentors. Vincent Abato and I had a great relationship. I've been very blessed to have the best of the best. Writing for *Saxophone Journal* was also great for me. For over 20 years I was the Career Management and Private Lessons writer. Here I was being taught by all the wonderful musicians I had the privilege of interviewing. If I had another 100 years to live I don't think I would have the time to absorb all of the wonderful things people have discussed with me. Being exposed to all of those great people was wonderful. I know I was always meant to be a saxophone player, but I wasn't always the best saxophone player and I think that's what makes me a good teacher. I always tell my students I was just someone who worked really hard and diligently. My father was a steel worker machinist. He told me to work hard every day and you'll get what you want. He was right.

Lastly, we have to thank Ken Dorn for what he did for so many years as Publisher of *Saxophone Journal*, and a special thanks to all my friends and especially Dave Gibson, Editor of *Saxophone Journal* and now Publisher and Editor of *Saxophone Today*, for pursuing this new venture. We will survive the technological change in the way magazines are published. §

Greg Banaszak's Selected Discography

- *Hovhaness Concerto for Soprano Saxophone and Orchestra* (Naxos, 2013)
- *Lukaszewski Musica Sacra 1, Trinity Concerto* (2012)
- *Neo-Ragtime: The Music of Brain Dykstra* (Centaur, 2012)
- *Duos Concertos for Alto Saxophone, Flute and Orchestra* (Centaur, 2011)
- *Concertos for Saxophone and Orchestra* (Centaur, 2011)
- *I'll Remember April, Bird w/Strings Revisited* (Polonia Jazz, 2011)
- *Romances for Saxophone and Orchestra* (2 CDS) (Centaur, 2008)
- *Koch Suite For Alto Saxophone & Piano, Koch Contrasts* (Dimension, 2000)
- *Saxophone Concertos* (Centaur, 1999)
- *Double Vision* (with Christopher Casey) (Ranch, 1995)
- *The Glazunov Concerto* (Chanson, 1991)

Publications

- *Romances for Saxophone and Piano* (Music Minus One, MMO 4341)