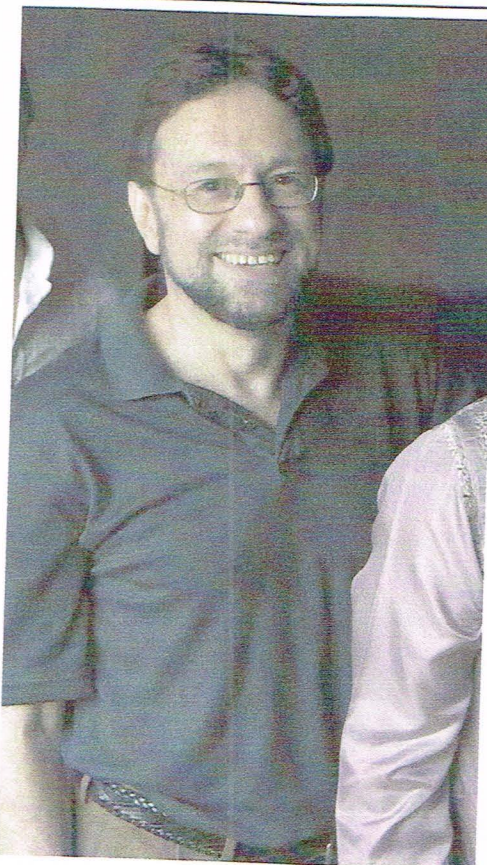


Lewis Porter

Interview by Nora McCarthy



JI: Lewis, first of all thank you for agreeing to this interview. Many people in the jazz world, be they musicians, scholars, educators, or students, know of your work and your high level of involvement and achievement as a musician, composer, professor and writer for the past several decades. Some may know you in one capacity or the other more so, but you have managed to juggle several careers simultaneously without missing a beat or changing direction. Your dedication to jazz music has been your driving force, please talk about your early background and what prompted you to take this course in life.

LP: Well, probably like most people who are in music, I can't really say, *why* I can just say *when*. Nobody in my family was a musician and yet by the age of ten, I decided I was going to devote my life to music and I never wavered since that moment. I never had the slightest doubt. So, you might say, *well, excuse me, how did that happen?* In terms of music around the home, in those days, my mom used to play. We had an upright piano in the house, very rarely, once in a blue moon, she would sit down and play a popular song or one of the Chopin waltzes.

JI: Where did you grow up?

LP: I was born in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

When I was a baby we moved to Minneapolis. While I was still a baby, we moved to North Decatur, Georgia, which is a suburb of Atlanta. I was actually raised there until I was six-and-a-half and then we moved to New York. Everybody thinks I'm a native New Yorker, but I actually am not. I identify as a New Yorker but I'm not a native.

JI: Getting here at the age of six-and-a-half, to me is native enough.

LP: I really loved it down south. When you're six-and-a-half, it's not as if you don't remember things. I went to kindergarten and the first half of the first grade in Georgia. North Decatur was a small suburb of Atlanta, but Atlanta has grown. When I was the guest speaker at Emory University I was driven around the area which is all part of Atlanta now. When we lived there, it was a suburb. We lived in one apartment in a four family house and we lived kind of on the edge of the woods. I used to run into the woods and find lizards and pick blackberries. I went to a two room schoolhouse and I remember coming home one day and asking my mother how come the teacher says, one, two, three, fowah—and her telling me that's how they say it down here. I said, "that's not how you say it." Of course, my folks were from, New York and Pennsylvania.

JI: It seems like you had good ears back then to have picked up on subtleties in dialect at such an early age, a precursor to your later musicianship. What made your parents decide to move to Georgia?

LP: My father was a mechanical engineer in the clothing business and most of the work was in factories down south. But while we were down there, my parents divorced. It was quite a shock in those days—the mid '50s—and it was very tough on my mom. I was born in 1951, one of three boys. I was three at the time of the divorce, my younger brother was one, and my older brother was six-and-a-half. So my mother was left to raise us, without alimony.

JI: That was very traumatizing.

LP: Yes. She had to look for a job as a secretary in Atlanta but we ended up moving to the Bronx in New York, at the request of her parents, who reached out to help her raise my brothers and me while she worked.

JI: What a hard and humble beginning for you.

LP: I can't say it was easy.

JI: Emotionally hard.

LP: Yes. My mother was so stressed out for years and years because it was just her and the three of us. And because she didn't have much money, it was the four of us in a one-bedroom apartment. We moved a few times to different sized apartments. For a while it was a one bedroom apartment, where she slept on the couch in the living room and my brothers and I shared a bedroom.

JI: So, how often did you see your father after that?

LP: Once a year, sometimes once every two years, sometimes, three years would go by and he'd come by for a day—I remember him picking me up from school once when I was in the first grade living in Georgia and I spent a few hours with him. I wouldn't call that very often.

JI: That was more like a death.

LP: Yes. But he did start to be more in touch when we were in college. He made a point to contact us. He apologized. It was still a phone call, maybe on your birthday, *if* he remembered, and seeing him every two years or so. It wasn't any more frequent than that but at least I can say he tried a little bit. I tried also, for my own sake I made an effort to get to know him because of the fact that one day, I knew he was going to pass away and I didn't want to say that I never knew my dad. He passed away in 2000.

JI: I believe that the people who have the biggest hearts—the beautiful people—that when you meet them, they express themselves creatively, as you do, always seem to have come from that kind of emotionally painful background. Somewhere, in their past, they experienced a lot of emotional pain. When you work through that stuff it just makes you a better person even though it's a lousy way to have to get there.

LP: Nice of you to be so understanding. Well, I've been divorced twice and my second marriage, which didn't last very long, was particularly painful and difficult. I have a saying about it, *if you really want to grow up fast, marry the wrong person*. Though, I don't think you should do it for that reason. [laughter]

JI: That's so funny—you turned a bad experience into wisdom. The psychology of who we are is so interesting. We go to therapists and we try to figure everything out, but sometimes we are attracted to the kinds of people, aka the wrong people, in order to reenact the original pain of abandonment.

LP: There's real truth to that. There's a psychologist by the name of Hendrix and that's what he teaches in his books and TV lectures. The only thing he doesn't address is the question of when does that stop happening. I have learned, that it doesn't have to be till the day you die. Good therapists, good friends to talk to, and an attitude of wanting to change and wanting to develop can help you to move on. But if you don't investigate it, then you will continue to do that.

JI: When does it stop? Well guess what—it's a part of who you are and you must embrace it, understand it and make room for it, but you don't let it control you anymore.

LP: My point is that it doesn't mean that you

(Continued on page 12)

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are doomed to be with the wrong person every time. You understand that you are attracted to a particular person, but you know now that it isn't good for you. You can learn that.

Jl: We can talk about that subject forever, but the person who you really have to learn to be with is yourself. I'm the best person for myself once I can adjust to who I am, accept who I am and love who I am. I don't need anybody to fill in any of the cracks anymore. That's not necessary. I don't look outside anymore for my fulfillment. It truly is all about the relationship with self.

LP: I think it's very true. I'm very good with myself, I enjoy my company and that's important.

Jl: So the music is not a matter of *why*, but *when*?

LP: What I'm saying is who knows *why* it happens. I was so intensely excited about music by the time I was ten that I made a decision to devote my life to music.

Jl: Was it classical, was it jazz right away, or popular? What was the lure?

LP: Well that's the thing. All I knew was that once in a while my mom would sit and play the piano, which by the way, did not do much for me. She would just read some sheet music—a few songs for a few minutes and that would be it. That's not really what did it for me. What did it for me was my older brother who listened to classical music on WQXR radio in New York. He was an avid reader and would read reviews and collect LPs. He brought home Beethoven Symphonies, Brahms Symphonies, Tchaikovsky Symphonies and the Violin Concertos and I was so ecstatic. I would listen to them over and over and over. When I was seven, eight, nine, I would roll on the floor to the exciting moments, I was on my back just rolling from excitement. At night, when I went to bed, I would pull the covers over my head and imagine conducting an orchestra. I knew I wanted to devote my life to music. The only problem is at that point, I didn't play an instrument yet. As it happened when I was ten my mom decided that, like all good middle class Jewish kids, we should have music lessons. My brother was already having lessons on the upright piano and I guess she and he decided that they didn't want too many people on the piano. On top of it growing up in the Bronx we had one particular neighbor who would start tapping with a broom handle on their ceiling for us to "cut it out" every time we'd touch that piano, it was horrible. At that point, we decided I was going to study the violin. I did the violin for about three years, and though my teacher said I was doing great, I wasn't happy with it. I'm glad I had it because it's a good background, but it wasn't for me. The thing I hated the most was, having to hold it up with my neck. If you're not comfortable holding an instrument up with your neck, the violin is not for you. During the time when I was playing the violin, around eleven and twelve, I just sort of gravitated toward the up-

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right. At that point, I was also just starting to get interested in jazz—not even knowing what jazz was. I loved the music I heard on the *Peter Gunn TV* show, which I know now, from the beginning of the show till the end had almost a continuous sound track of jazz music and sometimes on screen jazz musicians because the show was set in a jazz club. I know now, that some of those people were quite famous. It was Shelley Manne, on the soundtrack they had Jimmy Rowles on piano, Jack Sheldon on trumpet, Art Pepper played sax and, Ray Brown on bass on some of them. So, it was actually very good jazz. The themes were all written by Henry Mancini and I would tap some of those chords and melodies out on the piano. I started gravitating toward the piano but I hadn't really made a decision yet. My older brother was already taking lessons with a strict German woman who according to my mom requested to teach me. I would hear her, on occasion, yelling at my brother, "No, no, no!" I thought to myself, 'This doesn't sound like fun.' She would be trying to show my brother something and apparently he couldn't do it, so she would call me in to show him how and I could play it. But that was devastating for my brother and I didn't want to study with her because of her manner of teaching so as a result of that, to this day, I am primarily self taught as a piano player. That being said, I've had about three years of lessons and most of it was not continuous. Among those three years of lessons however, I gleaned information from many of the leading piano "gurus" of the world, past and present, including books by Abby Whiteside

(continued on Page 27)

Lewis Porter

(continued from page 12)

(and a lesson with her protégé Sophia Rosoff), the methods of Dorothy Taubman (and a lesson with her protégé Edna Golandsky), and DVDs by Seymour Fink and Alan Fraser, as well as lessons with jazz “gurus” Andy LaVerne, Steve Kuhn, and many others. I have also studied the posture systems of Feldenkrais and Alexander, as well as yoga. I do *not* claim to be an “expert” on any of these approaches, but I have drawn on all of them, and more.

JL: The piano chose you it seems from an early age but more importantly, it was the music...at what point did you decide to be a jazz musician, how did that come about?

LP: I knew I wanted to play professionally and I started to play in middle school when there was a little party. I played some Beatles, some Rolling Stones, etc. It was at the age of fourteen that I finally realized that jazz was my favorite kind of music and it happened one day when my brother subscribed to Columbia House Record Club. The ad was always the same... introductory offer, ten records, for a penny plus shipping and handling. My older brother wanted to join this record club but could only find nine records that he liked so he asked me to pick one. I looked through and saw “The Girl From Ipanema” which was a song I loved and it was a big hit at that particular time. What I didn’t know was that “The Girl From Ipanema” featured Stan Getz’s saxophone and when that LP came, I put it on and I couldn’t stop playing it. I played Side A, Side B, back to Side A, back to Side B, I said, ‘This is unbelievable.’ When my brother came home I asked him, ‘Who is this Stan Getz?’ So he took out the Schwann Catalog, if you remember that, and he said, “I see his name here under jazz.” This was the defining moment for me, I said, “If he’s listed under jazz then now I know, jazz is the kind of music that I’m going to devote my life to.” From that day forward, I got very deep into jazz, I started collecting jazz albums. By the time I was fifteen, I was winning blindfold tests on WKCR. I very quickly developed an ear for style, and I knew who a lot of the players were. When I went to college I went to the college radio station the first week that I was there and I said, I’d like to do a jazz show and they auditioned me. This was a big station by the way, similar to WKCR in New York, not just broadcast on campus but everybody in town used to listen to it. Long story short, they gave me a show and put me in charge of jazz programming.

JL: I notice how you pushed yourself. You didn’t seem to be very shy in going after what you wanted, where did this confidence come from?

LP: Well, that’s very perceptive because what happened was I was always funny, among the kids who knew me but in those days, I was very shy, amongst anyone that I didn’t already know. Today, I don’t have that problem but in those days I was what they call, “painfully shy”. But

what happened was that this music really brought me out. When it had anything to do with jazz, all of a sudden I had no shyness whatsoever. Not only did I have the gall to call the radio station and say, ‘I know who that is,’ they would give me free tickets to the Sunday Afternoon Jazz Interaction Concert Series and I used to go by myself at the age of fifteen.

JL: It’s just amazing how you migrated to the music in such an absolute way. It was your source of inspiration and the catalyst that moved you to develop yourself and expand as a human being.

LP: Absolutely. When I was this painfully shy kid in a poor family when everyone was in rough shape, that music saved me.

JL: So you went to the University of Rochester, what made you choose that particular university?

LP: The reason I went to Rochester is that we didn’t have money and I had a New York State Regents’ Scholarship. If you’re familiar with Regents’ Scholarships they’re good only for colleges within New York State. So my mom threw the Peterson’s College Guide at me and told me to only look at the pages on New York. I knew nothing about choosing a college. I never visited a college—nothing. It’s funny that I’m a college professor today and that I have visited colleges with my kids. I learned that you actually learn a lot by visiting a college. I didn’t know that. I never set foot on a college campus. I looked through the book and I saw that the University of Rochester owned the Eastman School of Music.

JL: Were you a good student?

LP: I was always a straight A student—always. Before I went to college, I went to full time Hebrew School from first grade through fifth grade. Five days a week. I went to Yeshiva. Yeshiva was a very intense education in Hebrew and English, all day long. We went for an hour longer than Public School students and we did Hebrew every morning for three hours and even though we didn’t do the regular public school curriculum till the afternoon, it was very intense and accelerated so that when I switched to Public School in sixth grade, I was ahead of them in Math, English and Social Studies. The first half of the day we would discuss the Torah and we were asked questions about why the Torah said this and not that, we were asked what we thought. They were asking us these kinds of questions and we were in the third grade—they stimulated our minds. So I went to the University of Rochester and it was only after I got there that I realized, I just couldn’t walk into the Eastman School of Music. I actually would have gotten more education in music if I had gone to a regular college where they have a liberal arts music department and gotten a music major where pretty much anyone could decide they wanted to be a music major but at Eastman everything had auditions, because it was Eastman. Even though I had learned to read music on the violin, I had chosen to do very little music reading on the piano. I was doing everything by ear

and picking songs off of records. I was listening to Bud Powell, Monk and Erroll Garner and listening to songs they did. So I waltzed into the Eastman School of Music and I knew I had to audition on a classical piece so I put something together. I tried to play a fairly difficult Schumann piece, called the “Prophet Bird.” To give the examiner credit, he was a very kindly older man and he asked me if I was self taught and I told him that I was—at that point, I hadn’t had one piano lesson yet. He acknowledged the piece I’d chosen wasn’t an easy piece and though I had done it very well, but he said I was playing it under tempo, and by the rules of the school, he couldn’t let me in to take classes but advised me to re-audition the following year with a simpler piece and play it to tempo. So I did. I auditioned with a Clementi piece. Clementi was a contemporary of Beethoven but he wrote some pieces that were fairly simple. Then I got in but I had already lost more than a year where I could have been taking classes and lessons so I ended up not being a music major instead I was a Psychology major and took some music classes but at least I got some and I did get a year of piano lessons at the Eastman School and those were my first piano lessons. Then, I started playing in public. I got a little trio together and did some jamming.

JL: How old were you at this time?

LP: I started college at seventeen, because I was in accelerated programs. I was very immature and painfully shy, it wasn’t easy. But jazz-wise, I had unwarranted self confidence and I was playing all over the place. When I graduated from the University of Rochester in 1972, I considered going on in Psychology only because I wasn’t sure how I was going to make my living in music. I still knew that music was what I wanted to do but my mother was pressuring me to find something where I could support myself. I ended up in San Francisco in 1972-73. At first I was enrolled in the PhD Program in Psychology at the University of California-Berkeley, but by November, I dropped out because I was getting a lot of gigs. I took up the saxophone as a second instrument in my sophomore year of college. In those days I used to double. I would do some gigs on piano and some gigs on sax. I was getting a lot of gigs and I had private students. My rent was inexpensive and somehow or other, I was able to survive. After a few more years, I realized that I was going to have to continue to have roommates to share the rent and it wasn’t going to work forever, I needed to make a little more from music. That’s when I went and got a Masters in Counseling at North Eastern University in Boston. Thinking I could do Counseling for a day job.

JL: So, you’re teaching privately, going to school, learning a second instrument and gigging at the same time? You were busy!

LP: I was doing tons of gigs. When I was in San Francisco, I played regularly with a drummer by the name of Augusta Collins; he was Julian Priestler’s drummer. Augusta was a great guy and we did a lot of gigs together with saxo-

(Continued on page 28)

Lewis Porter

phonist Rich Pena. I also met a lot of people there that I know now in New York like Elliot Zigmund who played with Bill Evans. I don't remember when I got interested in Indian music but I was already interested in Indian music because one of the first things I did when I got out there was I called Ali Akbar Kahn, a famous sarod player, which is like an Indian lute you could say. I knew who he was so I called the school and said I was a jazz keyboard player and I was looking to play with some musicians from the Ali Akbar Kahn School. The receptionist thought it was a great idea and spread the word. Before I knew it I got calls from faculty members who wanted to play with me and we formed a group—it was myself and faculty members of Ali Akbar Khan School. I had tabla, sarod, wooden flute, and myself on keyboards. It was the four of us and on one performance they added a faculty member who played Indian violin and we did a number of gigs in the San Francisco and Berkeley area including at 1750 Arch Street, which is a well known concert hall and record label in Berkeley. Years later, I ran into Peter Row, who was the first American to give sitar recitals in India, that's how good he is. He was at New England Conservatory and I introduced myself to him once and he said, "I know you." I asked him how he knew me. He told me he had read about my band when he was in India, in an Indian newspaper. To this day I wish I would have seen that article. Just after I got the Masters in Counseling which I received in 1976, I was working as a Counselor in a half-way house. By January 1977, I was teaching Jazz History part time at Tufts. From there things moved very quickly. The Chair of the Music Department there is T. J. Anderson, an African-American composer. To this day I call him my mentor because he took me under his wing. He told me that I was a natural teacher based on the fact that the students loved me and I knew a lot. He asked me why I wasn't pursuing a career as a teacher. My answer was that I wanted to play. But, he kept after me—he hounded me. It was T.J. who eventually, with great difficulty, convinced me to start working toward an academic career by publishing some notes that I had put together about the Jazz History text books. I made the notes because there were a lot of mistakes in the text books. He asked me how I even knew that and I told him that I had been studying jazz since I was fourteen. He encouraged me to publish them. He knew what he was doing and I had no clue what he was up to. So, that critique of Jazz History textbooks got published in 1978 and led to a phone call from the late Martin Williams asking me if I would do some more writing and then to a phone call from Eileen Southern, the very distinguished scholar of African-American Music, who became another mentor to me. One thing led to another all because of T.J. who finally convinced me to get a Masters in Music Theory at Tufts. They had a student run big band at Tufts but they needed a Faculty Director so I took that on. My duties kept expanding and I was making more of a living there and finally, T.J. managed to convince me that I

should go ahead and get my Doctorate. At that point, I was pretty entrenched at Tufts, even though I was part time it was expanding all the time. I looked locally and I found out that in those days of all the schools in the Boston area, Brandeis was the one most open to my proposal which was that I wanted to do my PhD Thesis on Coltrane. To backtrack a bit, when I did the Masters in Music Theory with T.J. Anderson, I was already making notes for myself about Lester Young and he said that could be the basis of a Master's Thesis on Lester Young which it did become and one of the many calls I got when I published that first article about "What's Wrong With Jazz Textbooks Today?" was from a publisher who said they'd like to publish my Master's Thesis when it was done. One thing just led to another.

JL: I'm seeing you exploding intellectually and creatively during this period, right? Also, being mentored by important people, doors opening, you going after what you wanted played out like a finely orchestrated piece of music. You have a large appetite for many things and you many interests. Please don't mind my asking but what's your IQ? You seem like you must have an extremely high IQ?

LP: I will answer in a different way because I don't like to come across as vain but I've always had a lot of interests. I am very deep into film, in fact I teach an occasional film course although most of my friends perform jazz. I do have some friends who are film teachers, film scholars, etc. and my son, coincidentally, very early on decided to be a filmmaker which is what he does and he also plays piano on the side and gets gigs doing it. My daughter is getting a Psychology Major at the New School, she's also a fitness instructor and she already has prospects in marketing. I will say this, I've always had a lot of intellectual interests and I've always regretted that I didn't only focus on practicing one instrument, the piano, for hours and hours a day with teachers from an early age. But, I have a saying about that which is, 'If you like where you are now, then you don't want to wish that anything was ever different.' I do like where I am at now. I am much more happy with the way I play now, my chops are good, I'm working with a lot of different people in a lot of different contexts so this is no time to be saying that I wish I had done such and such differently. I always say if you change one thing in your past, you change everything. I also am not into this sour grapes thing like some people say, "Well, maybe you're lucky that you didn't have a formal music education." But, I have a PhD in Music History so it's funny because I have a formal Music History education in Research, I just don't have a formal Performance education. I probably would have been "great" if I had more training than I do, but I don't think it's a good thing that I didn't have more training, the only good thing is where I've ended up which I feel is an OK place to be.

JL: You have strengths in many areas and many things have opened up to you because of it. I don't think an average person would have been able to navigate as well as you have with such a

high level of accomplishment. One career choice is usually enough for most people. So you were able to take on a whole lot of things and follow them through to fruition and acclaim, what's on the burners these days?

LP: That is very kind of you to say. One thing I always have said is that before my days are over I would like to write for a symphony orchestra—because my first love is symphonic music. As you may know, last April, we premiered at Harvard, my three-movement Saxophone Concerto for Dave Liebman plus Orchestra—you can watch all three movements on YouTube. I've actually already finished a four movement classical saxophone concerto for Paul Cohen that's going to be premiered on May 2, 2013 and I'm in the middle of finishing six movements for my fellow pianist and good friend, Don Friedman I've done three movements so far with a string quartet that will feature Rob Thomas, who's a great jazz violinist.

JL: You're doing so many things and it seem like you always have a lot of energy, you seem to be very organized, talk a little about how you manage your busy life.

LP: Well I will say this, occasionally I take on private piano students, I also do guest workshop where I teach instrumentalists. I've done that in Spain, in Italy, and different schools around the United States. I always start by saying I'm a about efficient practicing. My big thing is that you do have a lot of interests, you've got to be efficient, it's the only way. It doesn't mean that every once in a while I don't let myself just relax and watch TV but I don't do it that often to be honest. I am very organized, I have a very good attention span, I can focus on something for long time but it is hard work. I'm not going to say I'm a master at this but I have learned how to prioritize. I've learned that it's OK to be late with one thing if something else is more important. The bottom line is this, the hardest thing and the thing I have liked the least about my career is that, writing, teaching take time away from practicing. It's only within recent years that I have been feeling fairly satisfied with the level of my performance and it's been very frustrating all these years until finally, in terms of prioritizing, I made a decision to practice hours every day, even if, it means I'm going to be late every something that's due tomorrow. For instance you're worried about getting something written by tomorrow or getting a lecture ready for tomorrow, then that's always going to take priority over your practicing. I simply turned around. I always have time for practicing and don't have time for this other thing, too bad.

JL: Do you have time to sleep—how about ing Lewis? (laughter)

LP: The other thing that I've learned is that have to be nice to yourself. You have to know when you're pushing yourself too hard. You have to give yourself a break. I haven't needed to do this lately but for years I used to take a day a week that I'd take a long bath and wa-

(Continued on page 20)

Lewis Porter

movie on DVD. You do have to be nice to yourself and enjoy what you're doing. Again, I'm not going to say that I've always been great at this but I've learned over the years that you need balance. Of all the things we've been talking about this is one of my biggest issues. Because I've done so much in the writing and teaching realm and because to be honest, I hadn't until recent years practiced as much—in my judgment as I should have—it's kind of a split in how people know me. There are people who still can NOT get it in their head that I'm a player. There are also people who have known me since the '80s who cannot get it through their heads that I'm not a "writer." That's not my profession. I get emails all the time that say, "Since you're a writer, I'd love to hire you to write something about [blank]." I've never written like that. I've only written because I'm a musician and felt I wanted to say something on a particular subject. I've never taken freelance writing gigs because I'm desperate to write. A writer is someone who loves to write and will take on a writing project if you give them the topic they'll do it. I don't do that, I pick my own topics and if it's something that I want to do, I'll do it but if it's something that you want to do, I probably don't want to do it. I made a conscious decision around five years ago, not to do anymore writing because it's too time consuming, I don't enjoy it, and when I'm writing, I don't have enough time to practice the piano. I feel of all the decisions that I made, that's the one that has had the biggest positive effect on my playing. But, there are people who still can get it in their head that I'm a player. I'm not going to say I'm not a writer because obviously I've done a lot of writing but writing is not my career, my career is making music.

JJ: So you see yourself first and foremost at your core, a musician.

LP: (1) I'm a player. (2) I'm a composer and doing more and more of that. (3) I'm a teacher, I do love teaching. (4) I'm a former writer. I don't accept writing gigs. I've turned down countless invitations to write books and articles in the past twelve months. I don't mind people asking but I say no to every single one of them. The only writing that I've done in the past few years is two things—one, a personal favor to Dave Liebman, and only for Dave because he is a personal friend. He wanted me to write his life story and I agreed to do that with him and that book came out in March of 2012. That's Dave's life story called *What It Is*. The only other writing I did was a series of fourteen or fifteen blog pages for WBGO's blog which features some of my previously unpublished research. There is only one down side to the fact that I don't write anymore which is that, as my students will tell you, I have tons—hundreds of pages—of never published and in some cases, quite surprising, research on various aspects on jazz from the beginning to now. My students get to hear all this stuff but they're always saying, "Hey Lew, what about the rest of the world?" I'm not writing, but I decided that it was good for a blog because they

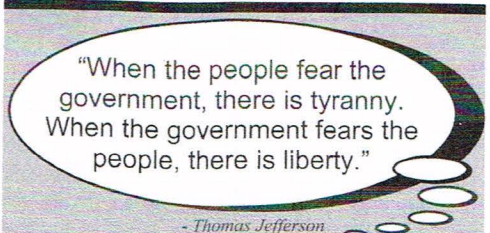
are mostly short things. If you look at WBGO.org and you search for my name you will hear a recording from the Congo in 1906 that uses the blues scale that no one else has ever written about and you'll be able to see information about the origin of Coltrane's tune, "Impressions" that's never been published anywhere. Some of it is in my book on Trane but some of it is new since the book and you'll be able to see stuff on Chick Webb and stuff on the origin of the word *Jazz*; I've got all kinds of stuff there. But, I'm pretty much done with all of that because even that is taking time away from making music.

JJ: Making music is ultimately all you want to do?

LP: People don't realize but that's all I ever did. During the years that I was teaching at Tufts in the Boston area, I was performing every month or two. I did gigs, with the late Alan Dawson also Herb Pomeroy. I had a regular trio there with two faculty members of Berklee—drummer John Ramsay and bassist, Ron Mahdi. We played live on WGBH Radio about four years ago. We were a working trio. I have a tape of myself playing alto saxophone on a gig with the Fringe with George Garzone. I did a gig there with Terri Lyne Carrington when she was fifteen, and we've played very infrequently but on occasion and in fact we have a big high profile gig in the Boston area on March 19 with John Lockwood on bass. So, it's not like I wasn't performing, I was performing plenty, it's just that in my judgment I wasn't performing at as high a level as I could have been because I was spreading myself too thin and now because I'm not doing all the writing, I feel that I'm performing at a more acceptable level. For example, here are some of the groups I'm involved in: Dan Faulk, world class tenor sax player who has recorded with Barry Harris, James Spaulding, J.J. Johnson, he's great and a lovely guy; he was also one of my first graduate students at Rutgers. Dan asked me to co-lead a band with him so we have a quartet called the Dan Faulk/Lewis Porter Freeology. There's a saxophonist in Boston who specializes in Indian music, he's another one of these American musicians who are so good that Indian audiences come out to hear him play. He plays Indian music on the soprano sax, his name is Phil Scarff. He asked me to be in a quartet with him and we've been performing and our next gig is on March 16. He wanted to have my name first so we're calling it the Lewis Porter/Phil Scarff Quartet. I'm in a quartet with the tabla player, Badal Roy, guitarist Freddie Bryant, and with a friend of Badal's on extra percussion, his name is Karttikeya. The four of us are called Dharma Jazz and we've been together for a few years; we perform infrequently. Alan Lowe is a very off-beat, Ornette Coleman-ish alto saxophonist based in Portland, Maine, who has done some award winning all star projects. His specialty is bringing together unusual combinations. I'm in his latest project which is called the American Song Project. I'm in a duo with David Rothenberg, who's a free improvisation clarinetist, an ECM artist and also a PhD professor at the New Jersey Institute of Technology.

I'm in a duo with banjo player George Stavis. George is a kind of a predecessor of Bela Fleck. I played with Bela once, we're on YouTube together. All ninety minutes of my concert with Bela Fleck is all on YouTube. I introduced Bela to George. There is an Italian rhythm section that is great that I've recorded with for Siena Jazz called Lewis Porter Italian Trio, with Furio Di-Castri bass and Fabrizio Sferra drums. They are two of the best and best-known players in all of Italy. The CD, *Italian Encounter*, was recorded "live" at Siena Jazz. This CD got many reviews and all raves. If you add it all up, I'm in a lot of groups and I get a lot of calls. Everything from straight ahead, because I love playing standards and I love playing changes to free, free, and more free. Just in the past year I've been on the following CDs: the new Dave Liebman CD on Enja Records, which is starting to get good reviews already in Europe, called *Surreality*. It features me on piano and Mark Ribot on guitar, Brad Jones on bass and Chad Taylor on drums. I'm also on a forthcoming CD that's already recorded with the quartet Dan Faulk/Lewis Porter Freeology. This quartet has a unique concept—almost every tune has a composed element, a swinging element, and a free element. I'm also on a forthcoming CD that's already recorded of Alan Lowe's latest all-star project on which I play with J.D. Allen, Noah Preminger, Randy Sandke and Ken Peplowski. We had a great recording session. David Rothenberg and I already have a duo CD that's out, and there's a saxophonist by the name of Chris Kelsey, he's a very good player that is very interesting. He plays very well on changes but also total free stuff. He used me on a CD of his that's coming out on the label Unseen Rain which is a tribute to Trane and Rollins. After the session, Jack DeSalvo, one of the producers on the session told me that I needed to record as a leader. Well I work mostly as a sideman and my last recording as a leader was recorded in 2000. Thanks to him, I just finished recording a trio on January 3. I recorded under my own name for Unseen Rain. I did a bunch of standards with Joris Teepe and my good friend Rudy Royston on drums then I did free improvisations on solo piano so the album is going to include some of both. I am looking forward to that coming out. I do so much work as a side person but when I'm asked for a CD of my music, I don't really have one so this will be great. I feel that it represents both my standards playing and my free playing and I feel that I was in good shape the day we recorded; it was at Tedesco and Tommy has a nice Steinway there. So all of those CDs, except for Liebman's which is already out, are coming out in the near future.

(Continued in the March issue)



"When the people fear the government, there is tyranny. When the government fears the people, there is liberty."

- Thomas Jefferson