

Edwards Pro Stop interview (October 11, 2002):

Christan Griego: You just got back from Austria. Do you want to talk about that trip?

David Taylor: Sure, I had a great time in Austria. On this trip, I was in Vienna, playing in two different settings: a jazz club called "Porgy and Bess," and Vienna's main concert hall. It was wild, soloing on this incredibly historic stage. In both venues, I was performing in a trio for bass trombone, soprano saxophone, and piano.

The composer and saxophonist Daniel Schnyder is a great musician. Although I've played in other settings with him, these days we mainly play in this format. So in essence he's writing all this music for the group we have formed. In the jazz club we play multi-genre compositions that he has written specifically for the group. Daniel has also done arrangements of the music of George Gershwin and Kurt Weil that allow us to improvise and stretch a little. In the concert hall, we performed in front of a silent film completed in the 20's. Dr. Faust is based on Goethe, and directed by the great German filmmaker Murnau. Daniel composed a score to emphasize the action and ideas in the film, roughly 70% through-composed and 30% improvised, and also transcribed additional material from Bach, Schubert, Mahler, Liszt and other heavy-duty composers. It was great. We had about 1500 people attending. We've actually played this piece around the world.

I'm returning to Vienna at the end of October to play Daniel's Concerto for Bass Trombone with the Tonkünstler Orchester Niedersterreich. We'll do four performances and a radio broadcast in Vienna's other major concert hall, the Wiener Musikverein. It's a thrill for me to perform as soloist in both major concert halls in Vienna in one season. This is something I'm really proud of...

CG: You get to play in a lot of different chamber ensembles. Do you have a favorite?

DT: I don't think in those terms. I've played L'histoire du Soldat with Wynton Marsalis and loved that setting. I love my brass trio, Areopagitica, the resident brass trio at Mannes College, with New York Philharmonic trumpeter Bob Sullivan and hornist David Jolley of the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. I've mentioned the Schnyder, Taylor, Drew Trio, and really enjoy this setting, as well. I guess I would have to say that whenever there are great musicians in small settings, that's my favorite type of ensemble. Great musicians listen to each other and give each other space. The whole idea is to communicate with the person next to you, and the great part of communication is to let the other person say as much as he wants. That's not just music, that's real life.

CG: Can you describe a typical day in your musical life in New York City?

DT: Well, as soon as I wake up, I'm practicing. My wife teaches, she gets up early, and then, you know, I go to work. There are days start by going to do a jingle, a lunch-time concert with the Mingus Big Band, a Latin recording session in the afternoon, and the same night play pieces like Strauss' Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme with the New York

Chamber Symphony in Alice Tully Hall. There are also crazy days where I get up, travel to Europe, and play a recital.

CG: Is your daily routine set in stone?

DT: Yes, my daily routine is set in stone. For the last 34 years I've started every day the same way, with the same series of exercises. I want to write a method book about this system, not necessarily recommending my exercises, but recommending a consistent approach. I plan to talk about how the exercises developed over the last 34 years, and what a consistent approach has done for my security and growth. For example, my first series of exercises are always the same, and take somewhere between 15 to 25 minutes, depending on how long it takes me to either limber up, get set, repair, or get away from pain.

CG: You mean depending on how you feel from the previous day?

DT: Exactly. But it's always the same series of exercises in the same rhythm, usually the same volume level. I don't go after perfection of sound right away, I go after the process (it's always about process for me). Then I always take a minimum of 20 minutes rest after the first warm up exercises. I've stuck with this routine throughout the years, regardless of my schedule.

CG: You've never committed to one orchestra or any full time job, and you've taken the liberty to pursue any interest at any given time. What's been the key to your success as a freelance artist?

DT: I think one of the things that helped me to be a successful freelance artist in New York City is that I'm from New York, and went to school in New York. I went to the Juilliard School of Music for six years. I wasn't one of those guys who stuck around school and only performed in the rehearsal groups in school. I left the building to learn on the street. Every rehearsal group, band, you name it. I think the vital thing, to be a successful freelance artist, is that you've got to immediately start playing outside of the school that you are attending. That's why I think it's great for students to go to school in metropolitan areas. Prioritize playing in as many groups as you can. Prioritize practice discipline, and prioritize keeping your mouth shut. Just do the job, listen to the guys next to you, climb into the sound around you, and go home and practice.

CG: How has the use of electronic music affected the scene in New York City?

DT: It's affecting music all over the country. And, with the world market changing, well, a lot of recording and movie gigs are going to Eastern European countries or places where an orchestra can be hired at a fraction of the cost of American groups. Combine this with digital technology, and you have the possibility of "piping in" a live orchestra to a production staff in a different country.

CG: When can we expect Pugh Taylor Project II?

DT: It's done. We're in the process of getting the label, giving the recording a title, and setting the release date.

CG: Who do you listen to? Who are your musical influences?

DT: The last couple of weeks I've been listening a lot to Harry Partch. Harry Partch is an American microtonal composer from the first half of the 20th century. I listen to improvising artists, pop, rock, and R&B. I haven't listened to that much orchestral stuff these days, probably because I've been playing in a lot of orchestra's lately. Wait a minute, let me answer this question another way: I listen to me. I've been doing a bunch of solo recording projects, so there's usually a project I'm working on. I have 3 or 4 CDs coming out this year where I'm either unaccompanied, or partnered with a soloist. So I'm always listening to or editing these projects. I've got an unaccompanied scheduled for release in Europe this fall on PAO records called Hymns, Hums, Hiss, and Herz. Also out in December will be Doppelganger, from CIMP records here in the U.S. This is an improvisation-based recording with drummer Jay Rosen and bassist Dominic Duval.

CG: Has recording yourself helped you in your concept of sound?

DT: Do you mean like recording projects?

CG: Yes, and even just recording yourself while you are practicing.

DT: For sure. I switched to the Edwards based on what I was hearing in playbacks on recordings I was performing on in the early 90's. In certain instances I made a direct change because of what I heard. In many other instances, and this may sound funny to you, I made changes because it's important to me that I have total musical creativity and whimsy in my playing. So sometimes that means not listening to how you sound, just feeling the process--making sure you have a horn that will respond to whatever your process requires. I have to say that there are times when I listen back as a trombone player and say, "Wow, I wish I could be more trombone perfect," because I know what that is supposed to be. But then I say to myself, "yeah, but listen to the colors." So for me it's a constant insecure battle between trying to get myself to play trombonistically perfect, and get away from the trombone at the same time. It's can be very disconcerting.

CG: What's the weirdest gig you've ever played?

DT: [Laughs] I'll have to think about that. I've played some weird gigs.

CG: Would Liza Manelli's wedding be high on the list?

DT: Yeah, it wasn't weird--that was just, [pauses] heavy. It was like sitting backstage eating dinner with the cats in the band, and Michael Jackson's hanging back there as well. It was a very interesting situation. It was very moving because it was down by the WTC, just a few months after September 11.

I played the Michael Jackson concert in Madison Square Garden on September 10, and that was strange seeing all sorts of incendiary devices being used as part of the show, and then the next morning I was on the phone with you when the WTC tragedy was happening. Remember that? I have to think about that last question a little more. I've done a lot of strange gigs.

CG: When you started Edwards you were playing the dependent valve setup. In the past year you switched over to the independent. Can you tell me why?

DT: I still play both independent and dependent. So many guys were playing on it (independent) that I couldn't turn my back on it any longer. I had to try it out. One of the reasons I stayed away from the independent set up earlier was because it was much heavier than what I was used to playing. With the earlier models of independent set ups, the rotors didn't allow for colors to change the way Thayers do. With the valve improvements and bell choices, there are more options now for people to match the valve sections. It's almost making the dependent vs. independent battle a moot point. I think you can make either work.

CG: What does next year have in store for you?

DT: My book is filling up with other projects. My next tour to Austria is the main thing on my mind right now. After the Austrian tour, I'll be playing the Schnyder Concerto in Chicago on November 12, and in New York on December 13. There are also a couple of CD projects that I've planned, so it's going to be another busy year.

CG: What is the biggest technical problem facing the trombonists you are teaching?

DT: I think that any musician who takes up the trombone today is brave. I don't get in any student's face these days about my own agenda of technique, because if you're going to be a musician, and especially a trombone player, you have to have an air of adventure about you. So, usually I don't push my students into a particular philosophy or into a particular way of thinking. One element of being a great trombone player is following your whimsy. Being a musician is such a positive force that I feel my job is to help students realize who they are, and to help develop their strengths.

Interview edited for website by Chris Branagan