

Regional

Jazz trumpet requires passion and practice

Jazz and the trumpet have an intimate relationship. Look no further than the works of Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie and Art Farmer to understand the love affair between musician and instrument.

The department of music at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville just hired a new faculty member who teaches trumpet for jazz. His name is Garrett Schmidt. Born in Maryville, Ill., he obtained his bachelor's degree in music from Eastern Illinois University and a master's, also in music, from the University of Rochester in New York. Like so many musicians, his entry into music started early in life.

"That would have been in the fourth grade, I believe," he said. "I think that back then the trumpet might have been too heavy for me. I was pretty tiny." Before that he was playing a lighter instrument, the guitar. His interest in trumpet began almost by accident.

"My oldest brother had a trumpet, which is the instrument he started on. I think it was maybe just convenience for my parents," Schmidt said. "Maybe we had an extra instrument lying around so I just started with trumpet. And then I ended up taking my brother's nice trumpet when he graduated from high school. I was playing on a coronet that had a bell that was kind of shaped like a taco. So when my older brother Chris graduated, I took the good one. I have it up in my office right now." His interest in jazz, however, was much more by choice.

"In the classical world so many people have done it in so many ways it would just be me trying to imitate someone instead of trying to create my own voice, or song, or solo," he explained. "I'm trying to do my own thing instead of trying to steal from everyone else. Maybe steal is a hard word, but that is what I am trying to do, create instead of mimic."

His decision to become a teacher was also very deliberate. "I always wanted to be a teacher," Schmidt said. "I think my high school band teacher kind of planted that seed in my head where I can both enjoy music as a career and enjoy teaching people every day. Giving back is some-



Photo by Kate Lemmon

Professor Garrett Schmidt.

thing that is very important, and kind of shaping the next generation of musicians is a really nice thought anyway. So I am just happy to a part of that here."

Schmidt said that he believes that the old classification of studio performers versus those who perform live really no longer exists. Musicians today, he added, have to be very versatile.

"I think it is just that you are a musician and you have to be able to function in the studio – and you have to be able to

function live," he said. You have to read well, perform it perfectly the first time, but you also have to be able to communicate in the live setting, as well. I think all well-rounded musicians would probably agree with that."

For him, successful music students must have a strong understanding of music theory first and foremost. They need to know how chords work and how they function in a particular setting. They also have to be good listeners.

"The best students are sponges," he said. "If you can gain something from every recording that you listen to, that is great. Otherwise you really just have to put the time in." He said he feels fortunate to have good students with strong work ethics, who are willing to wake up before classes start and warm up before 8 a.m. music theory class. "They have got to work hard and think about trumpeting in as many ways possible. Not so much this is the only way to do it. There are a thou-

Aldemaro Romero Jr.
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sand ways to do it. So you need to have an open mind and work hard."

One of the classes he teaches is on improvisation, and, unlike the subject matter, there is nothing improvised when it comes to teaching it.

"You can just sit down at the piano and improvise," he said. "Whether it is good or not, I guess that is another thing. But improvising is something that is learned, not just done immediately."

Right now Schmidt is working on some Clark Terry transcriptions. Terry is an American swing and bebop trumpeter, a pioneer of the flugelhorn in jazz.

"He is a St. Louis guy, a trumpet player, and he is amazing. But that is how you learn," Schmidt added. "You find out what the masters were doing and then you sit there with your pencil and find out what note and how it works here, how it works there. It is kind of knit picky, but once you get the fundamental idea down it really starts to open up some possibilities and then you can just work from there."

It is arduous labor, he added. "You do it in all twelve keys for a long time and then you kind of forget about it, but then it will come out sometime when you are playing. And I may realize that that was what I learned from Clark Terry a few months ago. It is a process." Schmidt is currently finishing a tune for a concert jazz band, but also has bigger plans.

"I would like to have my first record come out soon," he said. "I think I have some good tunes that could be recorded to have my first solo CD, Garret Schmidt quintet or sextet or something like that. So hopefully that will be coming out soon. That would be nice."

Aldemaro Romero Jr. is the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. His show, "Segue," can be heard every Sunday morning at 9 a.m. on WSIE, 88.7 FM. He can be reached at College_Arts_Sciences@siue.edu.