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TONY GUERRERO: BUILDING A CAREER THROUGH HARD WORK AND DEDICATION

BY THOMAS ERDMANN

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TONY GUERRERO: BUILDING A CAREER THROUGH HARD WORK AND DEDICATION

BY THOMAS ERDMANN

For those who want to work in the music industry of the 21st century, you couldn't do better than patterning your life on that of Tony Guerrero. With his feet firmly planted in a number of genres, for Guerrero the problem isn't finding gigs, it's turning down all the opportunities he's afforded. From performing (trumpet, flugelhorn, keyboards, and more), composing and arranging songs, having a play and novel published, to his widely performed Christian musical, to producing the records of others, to having hit after hit on New Adult Contemporary (NAC) and smooth jazz radio, a critically praised straight-ahead jazz recording and having other recordings reach the Top 20 on *Billboard* and other national jazz charts, to an ever-growing list of top-selling contemporary Christian recordings as a performer and producer, to his worldwide tours giving clinics at Christian music conferences, to his regular duties writing articles in a Christian magazine, to the television and movie and commercial studio work he still manages to fit into his days, Guerrero innately understands that if you want to work in the music world of the 21st century you have got to be versatile.

Growing up in California, Guerrero, after receiving early instruction from his band director on the trumpet, taught himself how to play flute, clarinet, saxophone, French horn, and euphonium, as well as keyboards, guitar, bass, and drums. As a young trumpeter he ascended in the usual way, through All-District bands, to the California Junior Philharmonic and the California Swingphonics Orchestra. Even before entering college, Guerrero was working six nights a week in local jazz clubs, being mentored by a variety of older and more established musicians. His own band, Vision,

caught the eye of White Light Productions, and his first release as a leader, while he was still in his early twenties, spawned a number of hit songs on the radio. From there word of mouth spread to the point where he was one of the busiest players on the West Coast contemporary jazz scene.

On the side, Guerrero has had a long tenure as a working musician in a variety of church situations, and was working as Director of Creative Arts at Saddleback Church when the Pastor there, Rick Warren, had his book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, become a publishing phenomenon. Very quickly Guerrero was in demand as a religious music conference session leader, as well as organizing, composing, arranging, and managing the music and musicians for a multitude of tours throughout the world with the Saddleback outreach programs.

Among the artists Guerrero has worked with, from a wide variety of genres, are Morris Chapman, CeCe Winans, Slash, Brian Wilson, Greg Vail, Gerald Albright, Andy Summers of The Police, Dave Koz, Sheila E, Merv Griffin, Bobby McFerrin, Jimmy McGriff, The Jonas Brothers, Hank Crawford, Freddie Hubbard, Billy Idol, and Larry Carlton, among others. Even the very selected discography accompanying this article only points to a fraction of the recordings on which Guerrero's performances or producing or writing credits have been captured for eternity. Even with all of this, none of it takes into account his work as producer of the SongSeeker Songwriting Contest and the rest of the list of accomplishments Guerrero's hard work have produced. Just like interviewing saxophonist, arranger, composer, and conductor Tom Scott, the question isn't what to cover; it's all about deciding what to leave out.

Erdmann: *One of the people you credit with giving you the love of music is an old teacher of yours, Mark Takeuchi. What was there about his teaching that inspired you to want to make music your life?*

Guerrero: I didn't grow up in a house that was full of music, but I had a vague interest in music when I was younger. I have some relatives who play music, but it was not something that was driven into me at an early age. I started playing the trumpet when I was about nine years old. About three years later I almost gave up playing because I wasn't that into it, at that time. What I really wanted to be, when I was a kid, was to grow up to be a cartoonist. I remember very clearly a moment when Mr. Takeuchi said a very specific thing that made all the lights go on, and something was triggered in my brain. We were in an orchestra rehearsal when he stopped the music. He told us the way he wanted us to approach a passage of music. His description was so great I was forever changed. He said something to the effect of, "I want you to imagine you're on a stream and you're floating down a river." There was something about the way he created the imagery that I suddenly felt a

connection between myself and music. I've always counted that moment as important to me. When I saw the movie *Mr. Holland's Opus*, there is a scene like that with a young clarinet player when all of a sudden she gets it, and I got emotional watching that scene because that moment was identical to my moment. From there he was a great influence in terms of constantly encouraging me. He saw I had an interest in composing, and learning other instruments. He would send me home every weekend with a different instrument, a snare drum or a flute or a tuba, just so I could try it out and play around with it.

When I got into high school my director was Walter Houston, who was also very encouraging, and did a lot of things to promote me as a writer and arranger. I had no experience, but he allowed me to bring the concert band, the orchestra, and the choirs together, along with my jazz group that I was trying to play with, to do my music. Both of those guys were great in that they allowed me to pursue any little whim I had about music.

Erdmann: *As far as trumpet teachers go, is there a particular*

one you credit with helping you develop your technical abilities?

Guerrero: Not specifically. I had some really good teachers going through high school and college, but it was mostly when I got out into the world and started playing that I was helped. I was playing nightclubs with jazz bands when I was seventeen or so. It was during that time other musicians would start to take me under their wings. It's those guys I credit with specific things I do as a player, from a musical standpoint mostly but also as a trumpet player. There is not a single guy who I studied trumpet with for a long time who was my one big influence. A lot of my abilities grew from on the job training as a young kid and getting to work with musicians who were way beyond my abilities; I learned from them. Without it being really intentional, I was being mentored by these generous, more capable musicians. They just took me in long before I was qualified to play with them. They would put me on gigs and work with me. We would work together on off hours and they would show me stuff. It was a great training ground and it's something I think about now as I work with younger players, the idea of pursuing people who need to be mentored. Still to this day I have guys and players I work with who I consider mentors to me either as a trumpet player, as a writer, harmonically as a soloist, and so on. One of the challenges in music is the idea that you can never master it; there is always something to learn. It's both a blessing and a curse.

Erdmann: *At one point you decided to just focus on the flugelhorn. How did that decision come about?*

Guerrero: My high school did not have a jazz band, but by the time I entered high school I was playing some drums in a rock trio that played Led Zeppelin and Kiss; as a kid I was really into rock and roll. Mr. Takeuchi came up to the high school to start the high school jazz band for us. He brought a piece by Chuck Mangione, *Children Of Sanchez*. That song was the first time I heard any connection between playing trumpet and any sort of driving powerful rockish music. It totally captivated me. I went right out and bought a Mangione record. He was the first trumpet player that I was into as a kid. I really absorbed a lot about his approach to music, his writing style, and certainly as a flugelhorn player he had such a unique voice on that instrument that by the time I was getting on in high school I had a



flugelhorn and formed a little band of my own, playing flugelhorn and writing little songs. For a lot of years it wasn't all I did, I took a lot of trumpet gigs and played as many sessions as I could, but for the most part I was focusing on being a flugelhorn player.

Erdmann: *You are now coming back to the trumpet, and looking for an equipment setup that works for you. Most people go from trumpet to flugelhorn. How does it feel to go the other way, from flugelhorn to trumpet?*

“One of the challenges in music is the idea that you can never master it... It's both a blessing and a curse.”

Guerrero: For me I'm finding it's mostly about my approach. On the trumpet I've never been anything close to a lead player; I don't have an amazing range or a lot of power. The

guys I love hearing, as a fan, are Chet Baker, Miles Davis, and Art Farmer; people who go for the beautiful lyrical sound in the middle of the horn. That's what has always been attractive to me. I was always more attracted to the later years of Louis



Armstrong, or the 1950s – 60s era work of Dizzy Gillespie, where they focused on saying more with fewer notes and they weren't as concerned with the flash of their earlier years. While my friends were very into Maynard Ferguson, I was listening to Art. As I developed, my approach went in that direction; I focused on that sound, the mellow pretty sound. Now switching back to playing a lot more trumpet involves switching my approach to the instrument. Many trumpet players, when they pick up a flugelhorn, in my opinion, hit it too hard; they're trying to get the same big loud sound. A lot of times they lose the beauty of the flugelhorn. I have the opposite problem in that with the trumpet it's more of a challenge for me to get that characteristic of the trumpet that is often needed—the loud, brash and bright thing. Still my tendency is to go to the lyrical and pretty over the loud and high. But as I find myself increasingly doing big band gigs—for example I'm currently doing a regular big band thing with John Tesh and I have to be trumpet player in that band and not a flugelhorn player—this means I have to be really aware of adjusting my approach. I think a big part of us as players, switching between instruments, is that you really shouldn't be picking up two different horns with the same approach. There should be some adjustment.

Erdmann: *You covered three topics I'd like to hit in more depth. The first is your album Another Day, Another Dream, has a tune, Amorado, as well as a few of the tunes on your Apasionado album, that to my ears seem clearly influenced by one of the people you list as an influence, Chuck Mangione. When I interviewed Allen Vizzutti (Jazz Player magazine, June/July 2001), one of the things he mentioned about the time he spent with Chuck was that, "(Chuck's) gifts were (as a composer) very impressionable. At that time other students and I had to make a conscious effort not to copy him." Is it possible to be a trumpeter from our era and not be influenced by Chuck?*

"...my tendency is to go to the lyrical and pretty over the loud and high."

Guerrero: I certainly understand what Vizzutti was saying. I do have a way of writing, sometimes, where if I want to approach Chuck's style I can get pretty close because it is part of my bloodstream. If I'm going to write in that way I have to be sure I'm not just copying him and that I am really expressing something that is in me as a composer; that part of me is very important to who I am. I don't want to just copy what's out there. Is it possible to be a trumpeter from our era and not be influenced by Chuck? Yes it's possible, but I don't want to not be influenced by the guys I love. When I find myself being influenced by Louis Armstrong or Freddie Hubbard, what better role model can I have? When I play something that comes off like that, which believe me is rare, I'm thrilled that influence can come out in my playing. I think about those players sometimes when I approach a song, "How would Art Farmer play this tune?" I've never been one to shy away from the influence, but I do try to keep tabs on whether I'm presenting that as a tribute or thievery. I can't say I haven't crossed the line, because I'm sure I have. One of my early albums has a song

specifically written as a tribute to Mangione, called *Mangione*. I thought that if I was going to do a tribute I should make it really obvious. My album *Apasionado* was definitely aimed at Brazilian and Latin music. I don't think you can help but be influenced by those who made their mark in that music. If you pick up

a flugelhorn and play a pretty Latin melody in a minor key you're going to sound like Mangione. There is almost no way around that. For that album, that's fine, that's what it should be.

Erdmann: *On Apasionado you don't play in the high register a lot, but when you go up there it sounds incredibly effortless. How did you work on building your range when you were young?*

Guerrero: This is an embarrassing confession to make to a bunch of trumpet readers, but I didn't really work on my range that much. I wasn't pursuing that kind of playing as a youth; I



TONY GUERRERO'S SOLO ON

ARLEN & HARBURG

IT'S ONLY A PAPER MOON

TRANSCRIBED BY

VERN SIELERT

FROM TONY GUERRERO'S CD *BLUE ROOM (CANYON)* 2010

1 G6 E7 A-7 D7 A-7 D7 G6 D7

6 G7 C7 C#7 D7 G6 D7

10 G6 E7 A-7 D7 A-7 D7 G6 D7 G7

15 C7 C#7 D7 G6 C6 C#7

19 G/D E7 A-7 D7 G6 G7 C6 C#7 G6/D

24 Bb7 E7(b9) A-7 D7 G6 E7 A-7 D7 A-7 D7

29 G6 D7 G7 C7 C#7 A-7 D7 G6 D7

didn't care to be the high note guy. I actually feel that I have a more comfortable higher range on my flugelhorn than on the trumpet. On my recordings I play higher on flugelhorn than I do on trumpet. It's a weird thing that has happened with me. When I go for range it has to do with the melody I want to create. That's probably not the right answer, because you're really asking from a technical standpoint, but I come from wanting to try to keep that pure pretty sound and just go where the melody or melodic idea takes me. I don't think too much about the technique of it. At various points in my history I've tried to work within my limitations to try and create a melodic statement. That has always been more important to me than the flashier technique, it's about whether I'm saying something melodically. Whatever range I have is just a tool in the arsenal in order to create pretty melodies. I do appreciate your thoughts. Being in the trumpet player world I know not being a high note guy has its drawbacks.

Erdmann: *Third, you mentioned John Tesh. One of your more recent projects is a big band album you've worked on with him, who you also worked with on his NBA theme for NBC. How did you meet and how is the big band project going?*

Guerrero: His music director is a bass player, Tim Landers, and Tim has been with him since the beginning of his music career. Tim came and did some gigs with me and my band about ten or eleven years ago. Tim loved my rhythm section and took them all on the road with John. His rhythm section has been friends of mine now for many years. Over the years I met John on random occasions. Tim was the one who asked me to come in and do some horn arrangements for the NBA theme. I did that, and then when John decided to do this big band project. I don't think of John as a big band music leader but that's the music he grew up with at home, so that kind of music was his next step. Tim asked me if I'd be interested in doing the big band arrangements for his new project. John does everything first class and we got to use the classic big band studios in Los Angeles and all the best musicians were there from Wayne Bergeron to Eric Marienthal. It's been a blast. We ended up cutting two albums. One is a Christmas album which was released in 2011, and the other one is the American standards album that came out in early 2012. We've been on the road doing that material since December of 2010. We go out with an eight-piece horn section, so I not only got to do the original arrangements, but we had to do all the reductions of the music for that size horn section. The album is full big band but we can't take that big of a band on the road. It's been a great project and very satisfying musically. John is a great band leader, he treats us all well and we have a blast on the road. The music is really challenging. Our lead trumpeter, Willie Murillo, talks almost every night after the show about how hard the book is for this group.

Erdmann: *There's a reason why the smooth jazz albums by Kenny Garrett and Rachel Z didn't sell well, and that's because at their heart neither of those artists has instrumental R&B, which is what the best smooth jazz is, in their soul. Saxophonist Greg Vail said he was, "working with a bass player for a long time and one thing he said that resonated with me was that if you think Kenny G is sitting around in a limo listening to Coltrane and being upset that he has to play pop music, you're wrong. The fact*

is that Kenny loves pop R&B." Even Branford Marsalis told me he acknowledges that part of why Kenny is successful and connects so well with his audience is because he's being honest with his music. You had great success not just in the NAC and smooth jazz markets, but also with straight-ahead and Christian music. How do you feel about artists who work in musical areas that are outside their true callings?

Guerrero: A lot of what you're saying applies... you have to be a fan of the music you're playing. I think it's pretty obvious when someone is doing something to just sell a record versus

trying to express something. There are many styles of music that I love from my early rock and roll to my R&B stuff, and obviously I'm a big jazz fan. At various points in my musical career I have had the desire to express various facets of who I am.

I've never shied away from pursuing various styles of instrumental music. Even in my writing and other work I've explored all sorts of different styles of music outside of instrumental and trumpet music. For me as a writer and performer, I think people can tell when you're faking it. When I do music I am careful to not fake it.

Louis Armstrong could bring his special thing to just about any kind of music. One of the last albums he made was a country and western album. I have a feeling that was more of a marketing thing than a true expression of his love. To me it shows. It's a fun recording to listen to because it's Louis, but it isn't coming from his heart and it isn't a real artistic statement. I don't fault people for trying things like that because this is a hard business in which to make money. Trying different things to keep a roof over your head is okay, but ultimately the audience finds out when it's not real. I've never had an issue with Kenny G for the reason Branford said, that's who Kenny is; his

"Whatever range I have is just a tool in the arsenal in order to create pretty melodies."



SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

As A Leader

Blue Room (Charleston Square Records, 2010)
Apasionado (Native Language, 2008)
This Is The Hi-Fi Quintet (Swingfest Records, 2008)
The Journey - Original Cast Recording (Saddleback, 2005)
The Hi-Fi Quintet (Swingfest Records, 2003)
Christmas Songs (Nickeldimeus/Sausage Bread, 2002)
Ballads (Windsong Entertainment Group, 2001)
Mysterie (Nu Groove Records, 1996)
Now & Then (Fahrenheit Records, 1995)
Another Day, Another Dream (Nova Records, 1991)
Different Places (Nova Records, 1990)
Tiana (White Light Records/Nova Records, 1988)

With Others

With Blake Aaron
Desire (Innervision, 2007)
With Every Touch (Innervision, 2002)

With Wayne Bergeron
Music & Mistletoe (Wag, 2008)

With Big Band Liechtenstein
Live! (Tyrmusag, 1995)

With Erin Bode
The Little Garden (Native Language, 2010)

With Brian Bromberg
It Is What It Is (Artistry, 2009)
Brian Bromberg (Nova, 1993)
Magic Rain (Capitol, 1989)

With Mark Carter
It's About Time (Orchard, 2000)

With Toni Childs
House Of Hope (A&M, 1991)

With Khani Cole
Places (Fahrenheit, 1998)

With Dorothy Collins
Jazz Hymns (Geofonica, 2003)

With Colour Club
In The Flow (Vertex, 1996)
Colour Club (JVC, 1994)

With Will Donato
Will Power (Innervision, 2005)

With Ana Gazzola
Brazility (Yellow Green, 2008)

With Jonas Brothers
Jonas L.A. (Walt Disney, 2010)

With Gregg Karukas
The Sound Of Emotion (Positive, 1991)

With Jeff Kashiwa
Simple Truth (Native Language, 2002)
Another Door Opens (Native Language, 2000)

With Pat Kelley
Moonlight Dance (Award, 1998)

With Kevyn Lettau
Another Season (Samson, 1994)

With Michael Lington
Vivid (NuGroove, 2000)

With Bill Macpherson
Many Rivers (Third Beat, 1995)

With Magdalen
Revolution Mind (ERG, 1993)

With Michael Martin
Odyssey (Merrimack, 1998)

With Byron Motley
Jazz & Cocktails (Cocoa Blu, 2004)

With Rob Mullins
Dance For The New World (Zebra, 1997)

With Steve Oliver
First View (NightVision, 1999)

With Gregory Page
My True Love (Gregory Page, 2011)

With Roberto Perera
In The Mood (Heads Up, 1999)

With Dan Siegel
Fables (Native Language, 2008)
Inside Out (Native Language, 2004)

With Richard Smith
Soulidified (A440, 2003)
First Kiss (Heads Up, 1997)
Rockin' The Boat (Chase, 1989)

With Chris Standring
Hip Sway (Instinct, 2000)

With Evan Stone
Sticks & Stone, Vol. 1 (Red Jazz, 2006)

With Rick Tatum
A Message To Earth (Modern, 2002)

With John Tesh
Big Band Christmas (Tesh Music, 2011)

With Turning Point
A Thousand Stories (A440, 2002)

With Greg Vail
Smooth Jazz Classics (Greg Vail, 2008)
E-Motion (Innervision, 1995)

With Various
Santa Baby 2 Soundtrack (Living Arts, 2010)
High School Musical III Movie Soundtrack (Disney, 2008)
High School Musical Disney Soundtrack (Disney, 2006)
Thelma and Louise Soundtrack (MCA, 1991)

With Brenda White
An Evening In December (Brenda White, 2008)

With Sunny Wilkinson
Sunny Wilkinson (Positive, 1993)

With Windows
Apples & Oranges (Blue Orchid, 1994)

With Mark Winkler
City Lights (Chartmaker, 1998)

**Worship Music Discography:
 Work as Producer, Musician,
 Composer and/or Arranger**

With Apocalypse
The Final Plea

With Tom Brooks
Hymns Of Peace

With Charles Billingsly
Christmas
Enduring Treasures

With CBC Worship Team
Lift Me Higher
Morris Chapman
The Psalmist
Bethlehem Morning
Lanny Cordola
Blues For The Child
Shades Of Blue
The Trinity Sessions

With Troy Kennedy
Let The People Praise Him
Undone

With Jadon Lavik
Moving On Faith (BEC)
Roots Run Deep (BEC)
Christmas (BEC)

With Debbie McNeil
Love Me Still

With Rick Muchow
More Than Music (Encouraging Music)
West Coast Worship/Into Your Arms
(Encouraging Music)
One Nation Under God (Encouraging Music)
It's Christmas (Encouraging Music)

With Jaclyn Pruehs
Firefly

With Scott Reed
In Awe Of You (Dwell Ministries)
Revelation/Response (Dwell Ministries)

With Kelly Ruppe
Sweet Love

With Saddleback Worship Team
Small Group Worship

With Hilary Seleb
Second Chances

With Angel Smythe
The Journey
A Stronger Me

With Sunday Shoes
Significance

With Rick Tatum
A Message To Earth

With Various
Top 25 Hymns for Today
Top 25 Kid's Praise
Top 25 Worship
Top CCLI Instrumental Praise
Top Christmas Instrumental

SongSeeker 2008 – New Worship Songs
From Purpose Driven Churches
SongSeeker 2007 – New Worship Songs
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SongSeeker 2006 – New Worship Songs
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SongSeeker 2004 – New Worship Songs
From Purpose Driven Churches
SongSeeker 2003 – New Worship Songs
From Purpose Driven Churches
SongSeeker 2002 – New Worship Songs
From Purpose Driven Churches
Promise Keepers – Choose This Day
Promise Keepers – Decide Hoy
Promise Keepers – Uprising
Promise Keepers – Live Across America
World's Greatest Praise & Worship
(all Marantha! Records)
iKids Worship (Sony/Integrity Music)

With Adam Watts
The Noise Inside (BEC)

With Lyndsey Lloyd Wallace
My Favorite Time Of Year

EQUIPMENT

Trumpet: Yamaha lacquer finish Xeno with a Yamaha 16C4 mouthpiece.
Flugelhorn: Yamaha 8315G (Wayne Bergeron model) with a Getzen 3C mouthpiece.

first gig was with Barry White so we shouldn't expect Kenny to play Coltrane when he wanted to play R&B. That's what he should be doing.

Erdmann: *On your album Ballads, you play some of the best instrumental R&B ever recorded. I was blown away by how you have incorporated so much jazz improvisation into your smooth jazz. There is truly no comparison between how much improvisation you do on this recording and any other smooth jazz recording. Most especially on the track "The Moment," you rip off phrase after phrase of high tumbling thirty-second notes that most would easily associate with true bebop, yet you've found a way to incorporate it into smooth jazz and make it work. When you were young, how did you study improvisation?*

Guerrero: Most of what I learned was playing on the street in jazz clubs with other musicians. Most of my study was done

on the bandstand and not being afraid to take chances. Nobody wants to screw up in front of an audience, but I always try to make sure that during a gig I incorporate a couple of things that I'm a little unsure of so that I don't rely on things I already know how to do. I try to push a little bit. If you come to my live performances you'll probably know when those moments come up. A lot of what I present as a player comes from when I was playing with guys who would help me out. They'd either show me things or I'd hear what they were doing and then try to figure it out. The absolute best training for any kind of music is listening and I did a lot more listening, as a kid, than I did practicing, which I'm not saying was the wisest thing to do back then, but I just listened to everything I could including music for lots of different instruments. Cello is one of my favorite instruments, and when I'm trying to play a pretty melody on the flugelhorn the sound I'm trying to create is that of a cello.

In terms of playing bebop lines on smooth jazz, the truth is that when I started coming out with albums, the term smooth jazz hadn't been coined yet. For a lot of years I was one of the only trumpet players getting any airplay on what they then called NAC stations. This was before Rick Braun, Chris Botti, and all those guys. When I was putting out those early records,

"Trying different things to keep a roof over your head is okay, but ultimately the audience finds out when it's not real."

station programmers would tell my management and the record labels, "We're not playing trumpet, it's all sax and piano and guitar, trumpet is the odd man out." I had to really fight for my place on the radio at that time and I had some good success doing that. Part of why I had or have drifted away from the smooth jazz market is because as smooth jazz became a term and those stations started to make money it suddenly became an industry. It went from guys who were pursuing music they loved to now big businesses who would buy up a lot of radio stations determining what kind of music would be played. I've seen actual sheets sent to record labels stating the standards by which they would play a song on the radio. The song had to be within a certain length of time... it had to be within a certain range of tempos, there were only certain instruments they would play, those kinds of things. Suddenly I noticed that even artists I respected were releasing albums that changed what they were doing to try and fit within these formulas.

Unfortunately now the smooth jazz scene is very much formulaic where it originally started off with artists, like Kenny G and Spyro Gyra or Chuck Mangione, just doing the music they loved. The more it became formula-based the less interested I was in trying to match that standard. The album *Ballads*, for example, I originally did without a record label because that was how I was hearing the music. Had I done that album through a record label, trying to assure radio airplay, those fast notes would probably not be on the record. Those kinds of things, the phrases you mentioned, have more with me trying to be a musician than they are aimed at the radio, even though the grooves are R&B and of a certain genre. I was really just trying to express myself as a musician rather than trying to capture a market.

Erdmann: *Broadcast Architecture was one of those companies that sent around a standards sheet.*

Guerrero: Yes. I remember a lot of musicians really struggling at that time because they weren't able to make the music they were known for making. Suddenly they had to change because, as they would say, the guys in suits were telling them what to play.

Erdmann: *In a recent article in JazzTimes Rick Braun said smooth jazz radio is dead. He said this is good because the record companies now don't care what the artists record as long as there are sales.*

Guerrero: I think there is a lot of truth to that. A lot of music styles come and go in waves. I hate to use the term smooth jazz because when the music started it didn't have that corporate title yet. When the music started it came from the artists, but over time people were making money and it started coming from the companies and the business. I, along with a lot of others, predicted a death to that music simply because all of the heart and soul was gone, and you can't suck the heart and soul out of music without it dying. This is true for any style of music. It makes sense that those companies are walking away saying that music is dead and they're going to go look for the next dollar. Those artists are now free to start recreating. I have seen a lot of that and there is a lot better music coming out now than there was five years ago.

Erdmann: *This is true. Spyro Gyra has been shuffled back to where they started, on Amherst Records, and their newest CD is*

world music based with only one track that sounds anything like the Spyro people have come to expect. Jeff Loeb's new CD is a blues recording. The smooth jazz guys are now going in directions you never would have expected.

Guerrero: This is as it should be. I know very few musicians who just want to do one thing. I have an absolutely crazy love for Louis Armstrong, I have a huge collection of his memorabilia in my living room, and I love him, but I don't only pursue trying to play his kind of music; as you know, I try to do a lot of different things.

Erdmann: *You switched things up with your Hi-Fi Quintet recording, going to a more straight-ahead jazz ala Lounge/Louis Prima-ish thing. How did you come to decide to record an album in this direction, including the use of the organ instead of piano?*

Guerrero: A lot of the reason I started getting back into trumpet was because I was touring Europe, back in the 1990s,

and I connected with a number of young students there who were really into early American jazz. While I was familiar with it, I had never really passionately pursued it. They really gave me a love for the music. By the time I left that tour and came home all I wanted to do was jump into early 1930s

Louis Armstrong music. That got me to want to start to play the trumpet more, because to play it correctly you don't use a flugelhorn. In pursuing that kind of music I started putting groups together that would be aimed more at that traditional music, just to do gigs around where I lived because I wanted to pursue the music in a live setting. As I started to connect with other musicians, my love for this music morphed into what the *Hi-Fi Quintet* became. I'm a big fan of music history and I love the chronological order of how things happen, and to see the connection between 1930s Louis Armstrong and 1960s Louis Prima is amazing; you can see exactly, as you trace the music and the players, that connection. That was what I did with that music. As I started scoring one area I would be

introduced to the next area and then on to the one after that.

Through that I actually got turned on to a trumpet player who is not well known, Jonah Jones. He was with Count

Basie for a while, but in the 1950s he had a lot of cocktail jazz albums out that critics denounced him for; I guess he was the 1950s version of Kenny G. He was commercially successful and he had a formula; he always played with a mute and the drummer always used brushes. He is by far one of the most swinging players ever. It always shocks me that he's not better known. When you listen to him you can absolutely hear Louis Armstrong and Roy Eldridge and Count Basie, all wrapped up into him, yet he was coming out of the late 1950s and creating the whole cocktail jazz thing that led to the lounge jazz movement of the 1960s.

So the recordings I did with the Hi-Fi Quintet were all very much a progression of that. I wanted to play traditional music but approach it from a 1950s/60s retro-lounge vibe. One day we did a gig, randomly, with a B3 (organ), and knew instantly that was the sound we wanted for the band; it's such a great sound. My group now, more often than not, is drums, trumpet, sax, B3, and an upright bass player; we don't use the vocalist

“...I did a lot more listening, as a kid, than I did practicing...”

“I'm a big fan of music history and I love the chronological order of how things happen...”



anymore. I love that combination and am having a blast writing for the band. I really get to touch back to the Armstrong era, all the way up to even some more modern 1960s soul jazz things.

Erdmann: *That progression continues on your Blue Room, which is a straight-ahead jazz situation that spent nearly six months at the top of the national jazz charts. On it you play an incredible duet with the guitarist Jamie Findlay on the tune My Secret Love. When you're playing and soloing in a duet situation, such as this, do you change the way you play as opposed to when you have a full rhythm section behind you?*

Guerrero: Yes. Jamie is a wonderful guitar player and can do a whole heck of a lot without anybody's help. But whenever I'm playing in a small setting like that I try to be more aware that I have more of a responsibility to outline the chords in order to make my playing more of a partnership with the other instrument. A lot of times, as a soloist, I'm trying to think melodically. When I'm playing a song such as that one, especially at that kind of tempo, I'm definitely thinking about the changes a little more and just trying to contribute to making the two instruments sound bigger than just themselves. At that tempo I think any player has to admit that many times you're just trying to hang on. That's certainly not the fastest version of that piece ever recorded, but we did take it a bit up. As you play that song you have to be aware of the changes in a different way because when you're playing with just guitar you're may not hear all of the bass movement. The guitarist may have to decide whether he's going to play lines that incorporate the bass movement, or just hang on the chord changes, or try to find a way to combine the two. The guitarist has to leave a lot out in order to keep all of that moving. On a technical note, I did that recording on the trumpet with a Harmon mute, and in general when I play Harmon mute I like to be close to the mic and again, approach the playing very softly. That is the sweet spot of that mute; when you're not hitting it too hard.

Erdmann: *You also play a wonderful improvised duet without*

rhythm section, with saxophonist Doug Web on Just A Few. When you're soloing against another horn player, how do you make sure your lines don't conflict with what the other soloist is doing?

Guerrero: The truth is I don't know if there is a real trick to that, because when you're doing that chances are you're, sometimes, going to stumble on the same things. That's another up tempo tune where you have a lot of ii-Vs and a lot of changes in each measure so there is constant movement. On the recording it didn't happen, but many times on live gigs you'll find yourself bumping into each other in those situations; suddenly you're in the same area with the other soloist. Again, it's a matter of outlining changes so the form of the song is there, but you're still trying to say something melodically, yet there are a lot of things firing off in your brain. Luckily it worked in the studio that day, but it doesn't always work so well live.

Erdmann: *You've held a number of church related music positions throughout your life, such as Staff Musician/Worship Director at Colonial Bible Church in Tustin, California, from 1992 to 1999; Worship Director at Marina Ranch Church in Dana Point, California from 1999 to 2003; and Music Director from 1998 to 2005 and then Director of Creative Arts from 2005 to 2010 at Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California. You also served as Music Director for the Promise Keepers 2004 Uprising Tour. Did your extensive church music gigs come from early work you did while a child in church, does it spring from a foundation your parents gave you? In other words, what led you to be so highly involved in church music?*

Guerrero: My family is Catholic, and my first church music experience was playing in our church when I was in junior high, back in the late 1970s. Back then our church's music was what would have been considered very modern for a church, which was a couple of acoustic guitars, a tambourine, a flute player, a few singers, and me. Frankly, why they let me play with them I have no idea. I'm sure I couldn't have added too much musically. That was where I learned to transpose on sight, because they didn't have any trumpet music and I had to read flute parts or just normal sheet music. To this day I've remembered that was where I learned that skill because by the

time I got out of junior high I could sight transpose.

As I became an adult and began to explore my own faith, the church work didn't start off as church work, it started off as being a natural extension of being a musician and attending church. At churches there is always a need for music so I started to get involved playing and helping out when I could. One thing you learn about most churches is that they have a lot of need for talented people and little by little I'd get more involved, writing arrangements or leading bands or becoming a musical director. Those things just became a natural extension. My early church work just fell into place with all of my other gigs; on Saturday night I'd play at a jazz club, on Sunday morning I'd play at a church. As it became more meaningful to me and I wanted to explore not only what that was in my life, but also musically, I became more aware of the truth that certain styles of worship music are as free and expressive as many forms of jazz. There are some great musicians in the church and there is some great improvisation that happens in a lot of church settings. That was attractive to me. I've been fortunate in that I've always lived in a place where there have been a lot of good musicians. Even in the church I've been able to play with great musicians and make some great music.

My last position at a church was as Creative Arts Director at Saddleback, which is pretty well known because of Rick Warren.

Erdmann: *How crazy did things become at The Saddleback Church when The Purpose Driven Life hit in 2002?*

Guerrero: It became nuts. To be honest it affected a lot of the church and what my position became because to keep up with that type of surge (it is still the biggest selling non-fiction book, outside of The Bible, of all time), things had to change. That book obviously brought a lot of people and the church grew. My position, which had been 100 percent music, leading bands, and writing charts, little by little became more and more administrative as more services were needed to accommodate more people. There were more concerts, more conferences, and these all added on. Suddenly the whole musical side of my job became very distant and that was the reason I was there in the first place. All of that became a large part of why that position needed to end for me—because I'm a musician and that's what I love doing. I did, however, get to do some great things. I wrote a full scale musical, and while it's one thing to write one, it's another to see it put on in a major facility and have it filmed in HD with a full orchestra. I got to produce some nice albums there, I got to write some music, and I still play piano there on Sunday mornings in a gospel thing. I love playing in church, but let's just say I'm not the guy to sit behind an office desk all day.

Erdmann: *I know you had a goal of having that musical, The Journey, turned into an animated movie. What is the state of that?*

Guerrero: We've made some headway and had some good solid interest from a couple of companies about pursuing it. The animated industry is such a tough nut to crack. Trying to break into that area means I might as well be starting from scratch. It's been a little tough, but we've made better headway

than I expected to. There are some things on the table, nothing solid yet, but it is a dream of mine. When we wrote the show that was what we were picturing it as, on an animated screen.

Erdmann: *What advice do you have for young trumpeters?*

Guerrero: I try to leverage my advice based on the abilities and age of the players I'm speaking with, but generally the obvious thing is practice. To be honest, I wish, when I was younger, that had been instilled in me more so that practice as a kid would have been something I loved to do as opposed to had to do. I spent a lot of time pursuing and practicing what interested me, including improvisation, composing, theory, recording, etc., but as the years went on I had to do a lot of catch up in terms of technical issues on the horn. I know guys now who love to practice, and I didn't always love to do it. To develop a love of practicing, and I don't know to how to tell others to do that, but to not look at it as an enemy or some-

"I've been fortunate in that I've always lived in a place where there have been a lot of good musicians."

thing you have to do, but to really love the entire process of being a player from the practice to the times you get to actually use what you practiced, would be great.

To me, listening has always been number one. If you love

this instrument, listen to all the players who make it sound so good. Find out who your favorites are and find out what it is about their playing that makes them your favorite. I always encourage people to listen outside of the box. The internet is now a great way to find players you've never heard of. For example, I just found a guy who approaches the trumpet like an Indian wooden flute, and you would not know he's playing the trumpet half the time he's playing it. I'm not going to pursue that in my playing, but to see and hear all of the different kinds of things you can do with the instrument is important. It's great if you love Maynard, but if that is all you listen to I'm probably not going to buy your record. You have to be open to

"...you need to become part of the musical community where you live. It won't come to you... you have to go to it."

as many players and styles as possible, and to absorb all of it. One of the most fun things about music is the fact that we also get to listen to it.

Lastly, if you really want to be a player, get out of your comfort zone and start going around town to where the playing is happening. The best thing I did as a young player was to hit all the jazz clubs nearby and meet all the musicians. I sat in when I could, but I sat there night after night listening to them play, trying to figure out what they were doing. I made my face known to them so that if there was a last minute chance they needed a fifth trumpet player I might get the call. To get out there and meet your community is vital; you need to become part of the musical community where you live. It won't come to you... you have to go to it.

About the author: Thomas Erdmann is director of the symphony orchestra and professor of music at Elon University. Erdmann has had five books and over 170 articles published in journals as diverse as *Currents in Musical Thought*, *Journal of the Conductor's Guild*, *Women of Note Quarterly*, *Saxophone Journal*, and the *ITG Journal*.

