



Orbert Davis

Photos: Darron Jones

While Orbert Davis developed his musical training and early career around studio work, for the past 15 years the trumpet player has made a huge impact on the lives of students in Chicago. A longtime member of Local 10-208 (Chicago, IL), Davis is artistic director, conductor, and co-founder of Chicago Jazz Philharmonic and co-founder of the CJP Jazz Academy, as well as the school program Discover Music: Discover Life (DMDL). In addition, he keeps on top of the local and national jazz scene through his three-hour weekly radio program, *The Real Deal with Orbert Davis*.

Opening Minds

with Third Stream Music



Local 10-208 (Chicago, IL) member Orbert Davis conducting a Chicago Jazz Philharmonic performance at the Auditorium Theatre in 2016. The performance featured 35 music students from Havana, Cuba.

Growing up in a small town one hour south of Chicago, Davis's introduction to music came through his school band program. He took to the trumpet right away, showing genuine talent and dedication. "I was a serious practitioner," he says. Fourth grade teacher Chuck Danish took note and made the commitment to help Davis succeed.

"He is one of the most incredible people in the world. When I was in eighth grade, he heard me play and vowed to my parents that he would take me to trumpet lessons when I entered high school. Every weekend throughout high school he drove me 70 miles. The only payback he wanted was that I would help others; that definitely planted a seed in me," says Davis. In tribute to Danish, he later created the Charles Danish Scholarship to provide a year of mentoring and private lessons to promising young students.

Davis took private lessons with Mark McDunn who taught at DePaul University. "Mark was a studio trombonist with the CBS Orchestra in Chicago and he sort of carved a path for me to be a studio musician," says Davis.

When Davis got into high school he discovered jazz and met his best friend and later business partner, Mark Ingram. "We were both obsessed with music and performing; we fell into jazz because of the challenge of it," says Davis.

Studio and Studies

As he headed off to college, Davis joined Local 10-208 and began doing studio work. "Our union is a community," he says. "It provides a level of accountability and the highest standard of excellence possible. A lot of the

union officers are friends of mine that I've known and worked with for a long time. I've watched their careers blossom."

Studio work led to opportunities to play on stage with many accomplished peers. "There was a jazz club around the corner from DePaul called The Wise Fools. On Monday night all the really busy musicians formed a big band and played there. I got to play with musicians like Bobby Lewis and Art Hoyle. That really set the pace for me to learn what it meant to be a musician. I worked extremely hard," says Davis.

Davis's love for Chicago and its music scene grew from there. "Chicago is the type of place you always call home," he says. "It has always been an incubator. If you go to any major city in the world you will find musicians from Chicago—trumpet player Marquis Hill, vibraphonist Joel Ross, singer Kurt Elling, guitarist John McLean."

"Chicago jazz epitomizes the art of innovation," he says, describing the warm, rugged tenor saxophone sound of Chicagoans Gene Ammons, Sonny Stitt, Von Freeman, Fred Anderson, and Ari Brown. "It's the home of avant-garde; AACM [the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians] was born in Chicago. There are also the remnants of the spirit of Louis Armstrong and King Oliver, when they came here. It's the hub of the Midwest and the center of the nation. There are many institutions and universities focused on jazz and a sense of tradition. I've never had a desire to live anywhere else."

When he finished college, Davis was hired by William Russo (former arranger for Stan Kenton) to teach at Columbia College Chicago.

Davis taught trumpet and jazz history, and was Russo's right hand man for the Chicago Jazz Ensemble. Davis says he first got into teaching for selfish reasons. "I was so aggressive in my quest to be perfect with this instrument that I felt teaching would allow me to forever be grounded in the basics."

Discover Music: Discover Life

"After 14 years at Columbia, Mark Ingram and I started to look at the landscape around Chicago. I had always wondered why I never had many minority trumpet players as students at Columbia," he says.

He and Ingram went on a fact-finding mission, interviewing high school band directors. "We found that the biggest issue was that the inner city/urban music programs began in high school," he says. Without earlier band programs, there is no way for students to develop technical skill, let alone the perseverance, to achieve a career in music.

Chicago elementary schools had little music at the time. Initially, Davis and Ingram developed a program called Music Alive, which would re-establish music in the elementary curriculum. It proved to be a hard sell, Davis says. "Principals said they had gotten rid of their music programs to focus on reading and math."

"Every brick wall we ran into became an opportunity," says Davis. "We spent a year studying music advocacy. If the benefits of music education were true, kids involved in music programs were smarter in the core subjects and more likely to stay out of gangs and off drugs; music must be used as an antidote rather than a byproduct. So we developed a program called Discover Music: Discover Life that teaches reading and math skills through concepts of music."

Their proved the premise. Chicago students now have music in their classrooms and they are doing better in other subjects as a result.



A 2015 Chicago Jazz Philharmonic performance at Symphony Center Chicago celebrated the life and works of Gunther Schuller. (L to R) are: Local 10-208 (Chicago, IL) member, CJP Co-founder, and Producing Director Mark Ingram; Executive Director Birdie Soti; Schuller, and Local 10-208 member, CJP Co-founder, Artistic Director, and Conductor Orbert Davis.

“Most of the students in the program were deficient in core subjects. We guaranteed through our methodology that, within a year, their grades would improve,” he says. “We are teaching students how to listen, how to decipher, and how to connect.”

Davis now sits on the board of Ingenuity, Inc., which is focused on getting arts instruction back into Chicago classrooms. “Funding is getting better and more students have access to the arts. My goal is that, one day, every student will not just have access to arts, but music will be part of the fabric of every subject. Music provides a soundtrack for any moment in time—an aural snapshot. Today’s students are interactive—hearing and seeing things at a pace far different from when we were children. We can reach them through music,” he explains.

Chicago Jazz Philharmonic

In 2004, a few years after co-founding Discover Music: Discover Life with Ingram, Davis received a call from the director of the Chicago Jazz Festival inviting him to headline the festival and challenging him to “think big.” Davis, who had been doing some composing that blended jazz and classical music, said, “Great, I want to do a symphonic orchestra at the jazz festival. She sort of laughed and said, ‘Good luck with that; we can’t afford it.’”

Undeterred, Davis set to work raising funds, in particular securing funding from the Boeing Company, which had just relocated to the city. From the beginning, they knew the “third stream” Chicago Jazz Philharmonic (CJP) would continue beyond that first festival, given the aesthetic of what happens when you combine jazz and classical, says Davis.

In the 1960s, the term “third stream” was coined by composer, conductor, and French hornist Gunther Schuller who lived in both worlds, explains Davis. “It’s a third branch of music connected to classical and to jazz—a genre all its own. Schuller played with the New York Met and in the evening he was hanging out with Miles Davis and was good friends with Duke Ellington.”

CJP now comprises about 60 professional musicians and Davis says it goes beyond the third stream musical designation. “Our musicians are versed in both genres. It’s amazing how they respond. It’s about listening, adapting, interpreting, and most importantly creating,” he says.

Davis calls the CJP musicians family. He says the organization operates as democratically as possible, especially in terms of identity, inclusion, and importance. “There is no hi-

Photo: Darron Jones



Local 10-208 member Orbert Davis conducts Chicago Jazz Philharmonic in a 2018 Chicago Jazz Festival performance at Millennium Park that featured jazz artists Tammy McCann and Kurt Elling.

erarchy. Although there are section leaders that I depend on for advice and leadership, if someone is sitting in the last chair of the second violin section they have every right to ask me a question.”

For CJP’s first 10 years, Davis conducted the group, was a pro bono guest soloist, and composed all of the music, but there’s now a team of arrangers and composers to help. Co-founder Ingram, also a member of Local 10-208, is the producing director. The longtime executive director is Birdie Soti. Davis stresses CJP would not be successful without his team.

Additional sponsors support CJP, including the Music Performance Trust Fund, which has helped fund the summer concert series at Millennium Park, as well as educational concerts.

Chicago Immigrant Stories

The process Davis uses to compose is similar to the process he uses to write curriculum. “It’s very visual and all inclusive. For example, when I repositioned Miles Davis’s *Sketches of Spain* for Chicago Jazz Philharmonic, before I composed a note, I took a trip to Spain through National Geographic’s images, basically composing soundtracks to each picture. By connecting the elements of art to the elements of music, I was able to create music that was authentically Spanish,” he says. “I always say that my process is 80% research and 20% composing.”

Like all of Davis and Ingram’s projects, CJP’s impact goes deep into the community. “Every time we are on stage or in the classroom, change happens—a change in the creative process, a change in the dialog, a change in lives, and a change in communities,” he says. One outstanding example was last year’s *Chicago Immigrant Stories* concert series that brought together some of Chicago’s disparate ethnic groups.

“I’m extremely sensitive to propaganda of fear and marginalizing people and the results of the immigrant ban,” says Davis who has many friends who came to the US seeking better opportunities. “I have a friend whose ancestors escaped the Holocaust and friends whose ancestors, like mine, were stolen from their homes to become slaves.” But it was a Facebook post from harmonica virtuoso and Local 10-208 member Howard Levy about his ancestry that inspired *Chicago Immigrant Stories*.

“I’ve never worked so hard in my life and I never learned so much. It wasn’t just about hiring musicians from three Chicago immigrant communities,” Davis says. It started in October 2017 with jam sessions and 50 to 60 hours of conversations with musicians. “I recorded every minute of our conversations, edited the tapes, and composed music based on the jam sessions.”

Chicago Immigrant Stories included three musicians from the Chinese American community on moon guitar, zither, and erhu; Asian Indian musician Kalyan Pathak of Local 10-208 on tabla; three West African drummers; and dancers.

The project culminated with a free concert premiering the full orchestral arrangement in Chicago’s Millennium Park. “I wanted the audience experience to be that they are not looking at strangers playing music,” he says, “but their own community members.” A follow-up is in the works for this summer, which will include Greek American and Mexican American music.

Davis has long been interested in understanding the cultural characteristics of music. He went back to school to earn a master’s degree in history from Northwestern at age 37. “There were so many gaps in my education in terms of understanding where jazz came from and not understanding at all the evolution of

African American music from Africa and why music of North American African ancestry sounds different from Central and South American,” he says.

Chicago Jazz Academy

The educational offshoots of CJP, Chicago Jazz Academy and its youth ensembles, serve to inspire the next generation of jazz musicians. In its 11th year, Jazz Academy is a two-week summer camp at Chicago State University for students aged six to 18, plus a Saturday afternoon program. Davis credits the academy’s success partly to its teacher and student retention rate. “Last year, every one of our 12 counselors were former students and we have four or five teachers who are former counselors,” he says.

All instruments and all levels are welcome. “We are very much jazz based; improvisation is a must and each day ends with a major concert, but only 60% of what we do is music,” he says. “The rest is connecting music to other things.”

Though many of the 150 students who walk through the door each summer think they want to be professional musicians, Davis tries to help them see the reality. “I’ll ask the students, ‘Who wants to be a professional musician?’ Then, I tell them, ‘Great, find something else to do, unless you have no other choice. Being a musician is not an option, it’s a necessity.’”

“Part B,” he says, “is to practice like you’re going to be a professional and apply everything you learn to whatever you do. The skills that are found in music apply to everything—self-discipline, goal setting, creating strategies, and problem-solving—that’s what life is about.”

Today, Davis’s vision goes beyond Chicago’s city limits. “Musicians have to be multi-lingual in terms of music,” he says. In 2014, he took CJP’s rhythm and jazz sections to Cuba where they put together a 60-piece orchestra with Cuban students at the Universidad de las Artes in Havana. Then, in 2015, 37 Cuban students came to Chicago to perform with CJP.

“My goal for the next three to five years is to travel throughout the country and work with student orchestras, basically teaching third stream so that musicians become more diverse,” says Davis. “I tell classical musicians: ‘You do not lose your classical sensitivity by learning jazz’ and I tell jazz musicians: ‘You do not become stifled by understanding and performing classical music.’ This is America and this is who we are as Americans, you know?”

“I think that’s something that every union in the country would applaud. The more diverse the musician, the more diverse the audience,” he says.

RESOURCES

GAETANO DONIZETTI CONCERTINO IN F FOR ENGLISH HORN AND ORCHESTRA

Previously known only through a spurious edition in G Major, the authentic *Concertino in F* was discovered in Italy by Pedro Díaz, a member of Local 802 (New York City) and English hornist with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. He prepared this edition by comparing multiple historical sources and an intimate knowledge of Donizetti’s works. The publication includes extensive historical notes.

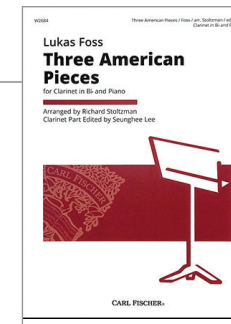
Gaetano Donizetti Concertino in F for English Horn and Orchestra, edited by Pedro Díaz, piano reduction by Mark Biggam, historical notes by Michael Finkelman, Theodore Presser Company, www.presser.com.



LUKAS FOSS: THREE AMERICAN PIECES FOR CLARINET IN B_♭ AND PIANO

First arranged by Local 802 (New York City) member and clarinetist Richard Stoltzman, this edition of Lukas Foss’s *Three American Pieces for Clarinet in B_♭ and Piano* offers clarinet revisions by Seunghee Lee. As a clarinet student, Lee fell in love with Stoltzman’s original arrangement and later worked directly with Foss to improve the piece’s playability for performance on the clarinet.

Lukas Foss: Three American Pieces for Clarinet in B_♭ and Piano, arranged by Richard Stoltzman, clarinet part edited by Seunghee Lee, Carl Fischer, www.carlfischer.com.



ODYSSEY FOR TWO GUITARS

Classical guitarist Frederic Hand, a member of Local 802 (New York City), has received critical acclaim for his international solo performances. His playing can be heard on the scores of numerous films. This piece was first presented by Hand when he traveled to the island of Crete to perform at a guitar festival. “The title refers both to my trip to Greece and also to the way in which the musical ideas interact with each other and evolve throughout their long journey,” says Hand.

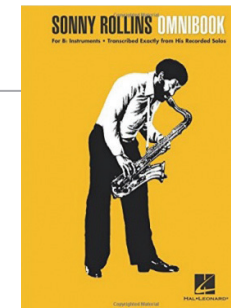
Odyssey for Two Guitars, by Frederic Hand, Handwerks Music, www.presser.com.



SONNY ROLLINS OMNIBOOK FOR B_♭ INSTRUMENTS

Saxophonist Sonny Rollins of Local 802 (New York City) has been called the greatest improviser ever. His improvisations follow well thought out musical rules that respected important elements of jazz. These 50 transcriptions, hand-selected by jazz teacher Charlie Shoemaker and transcribed by Chris “Doc” Stewart of Local 586 (Phoenix, AZ), represent a wealth of material for jazz students exploring how to improvise.

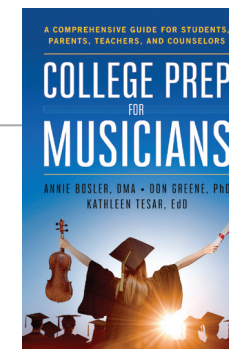
Sonny Rollins Omnibook for B_♭ Instruments: Transcribed Exactly from His Recorded Solos, transcribed by Chris “Doc” Stewart, Hal Leonard Corporation, www.halleonard.com.



COLLEGE PREP FOR MUSICIANS: A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE FOR STUDENTS, PARENTS, TEACHERS, AND COUNSELORS

This one-of-a-kind book gives a complete picture of the process of applying to music schools. *College Prep for Musicians* decodes the complex process of choosing schools, clarifies vocabulary around the admission process, and shows students exactly how to prepare their best audition. Young musicians will be able to follow detailed plans to get organized and to communicate with music schools and conservatories. This book provides tools, teaches habits, and demonstrates skills that students can use for the rest of their careers.

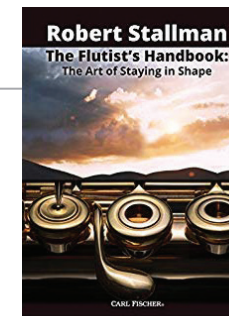
College Prep for Musicians: A Comprehensive Guide for Students, Parents, Teachers, and Counselors, by Annie Bosler of Local 47 (Los Angeles, CA), Don Greene, and Kathleen Tesar, Performance Mastery Project, www.collegepreperformmusicians.com.



THE FLUTIST’S HANDBOOK: THE ART OF STAYING IN SHAPE

Virtuoso flutist Robert Stallman shares his approach to “staying in shape” for students and professionals alike. Part I includes 24 invigorating melodic *détaché* warm-ups drawn from sequences of Bach, Schubert, Dvořák, and others. Part II is a collection of 15 short melodies designed to open and center the tone, while encouraging full breath support. All of the warm-ups are to be played forte and piano in every major key, proceeding chromatically by rising half-steps.

The Flutist’s Handbook: The Art of Staying in Shape, by Robert Stallman, Carl Fischer, www.carlfischer.com.



CELLO POWER BOOKS 1-5

The *Cello Power* series is designed to expand cello students’ facility and knowledge of the instrument. Book 1: *Thumb Position Duets for Two Cellos* is written in treble and tenor clef. Book 2: *Cello Warm-ups in Thumb Position* includes scales; arpeggios; long shifts in thirds, octaves, and sixths; and diminished chord patterns. Book 3: *Cello Warm-Ups in the Lower Positions* is exercise warm-ups of scales, broken thirds, chord patterns, finger patterns in thirds and sixths, and double stops. Completing the series are Book 4: *Piatti Caprices: Cello Warm-Ups and Related Preparatory Work for Each Etude* and Book 5: *Servais Caprices*.

Book 1: Thumb Position Duets for Two Cellos by James Hook, *Book 2: Cello Warm-Ups in Thumb Position*, *Book 3: Cello Warm-Ups in the Lower Positions*, *Book 4: Piatti Caprices: Cello Warm-Ups and Related Preparatory Work for Each Etude*, and *Book 5: Servais Caprices* by Marion Feldman, Carl Fischer, www.carlfischer.com.

