

Oscar Feldman

By Gary Heimbauer

JJ: Being an Argentina native, what differences have you seen in the way American culture receives your music, compared to your South American fans?

OF: Well, actually the audience here in the U.S. is open to listening to music from all around the world – and especially here in NY. This is a place where many different musical styles coexist and are being created, so people are used to being exposed to different artistic expressions. I think that whether I am playing in my country Argentina, another South American country or anywhere in the world it is essential for me to be true to myself and to play what I like and especially what represents me. As an Argentinean I feel I am very eclectic musically. I like to play Latin jazz, straight ahead, Brazilian jazz, and pop. And as a listener I am as eclectic as well. This quality is natural in us in that most jazz musicians in Argentina grew up listening to a mix of music ranging from our Argentine folklore, Tango, Jobim, The Beatles and Coltrane. That is why in my two albums *El Angel* and in my latest CD *Oscar e Familia*, I included different spirits, colors and styles in the same way an actor represents different roles but always finding my voice and personality in each of them. I'm an energetic, passionate and romantic musician. I guess these are universal qualities that are appreciated in every corner of the planet; whether in Buenos Aires, New York or Stockholm – for me there is no difference.

JJ: What was it like to go on tour with Eumir Deodato? How do you think that experience may have impacted you, personally and professionally?

OF: For this gig I was recommended by bassist and dear friend Art Guevara. One day I received a call from a drummer who played in Deodato's band who asked me if I was free the coming Thursday to play at the Opera in Vienna with Eumir Deodato. I said to him: At the Opera Vienna House? No! (*Laughs*) Of course I said yes. That was my first gig with him. Then we continued on an extensive tour that included countries such as Italy, the Netherlands, and Austria in festivals such as the North Sea Jazz Festival. We even traveled to South Africa. It was a real privilege to play with him, a Brazilian musician with such an international career, who arranged for Byork, Sinatra, Antonio Carlos Jobim among others. I really enjoyed playing his music that is cheerful, simple and direct.

JJ: You've been recognized for many of your various musical achievements, including winning a Latin Grammy Award for "Tropicana Nights". As a professional musician, what was the greatest honor you've received?

OF: Well certainly it has been playing with the United Nation Orchestra with the great Paquito D'Rivera as a leader. For me it has been and is always

an honor every time I get to play with him, touring with this incredible big band and also to have participated in those beautiful albums we recorded. And it is also a great honor to know that I was chosen by him, since we play the same instrument. But I would like to be fair because I have had many honors throughout the different stages of my career as a musician. It was an honor to have played with the great bandoneon player Dino Saluzzi in Argentina when I started my professional career in '80 – also having the great saxophonist Gato Barbieri record on my first album, *El Angel*. Playing alongside greats such

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as Alex Acuna, Horacio Hernandez, Jeff Tain Watts, Luis Alberto Spinetta and all the musicians who have played in my band throughout the years has always been an honor as well. Hermeto Pascoal, composer and multi instrumentalist extraordinaire wrote for me the song that gives the title to my new CD *Oscar e Familia* and with that he has blessed the album.

JJ: I know that you studied at Berklee College of Music. What advice do you have for current music students who are hoping to pursue a career in music?

OF: I think that the period of study in school is very intense and revealing, as had been my experience at Berklee. During the time as a student you learn a lot in a relatively short time – you absorb a lot of information, you can see where you stand and you can learn to be an intelligent observer. All these things are necessary and key factors, but at the same time it must be understood that this is only part of the reality of a musician's career. The professional life of a serious musician is very long and can go through many stages. I think the best thing that can happen to a musician who wants to continue in this career is to continuously fall in love with music. Like when you are in love with a person, you do not think: Oh gee, I have to talk or spend five hours with this person. So if you are in love with music you do not count the hours you practice, compose or study. And any adversity and difficulty you might be faced with, whether artistic or business related you are going to approach



with a better predisposition. You also have to understand that music is a large problem and it has to be solved little by little, step by step, being realistic and also feeling satisfied no matter how big or small your achievements are.

JJ: What do you do to recharge your batteries in our stress-filled, contemporary world?

OF: I just look at the smiling face of my daughter Valentina, who is a year and a half. That is my refuge – also to share many moments during the day with Sandra, my wife and partner of many years – spending time with dear friends, sharing a meal, conversing while drinking a good espresso, and listening to music. I also try to enjoy each moment as it comes, but do not really have anything specific to recharge my batteries.

JJ: Could you share some of the words of wisdom or suggestions you've received from a mentor or influential artist or artists that have made a significant impact on you.

OF: From great saxophonist Gato Barbieri and mentor who wrote a quote on my first album *The Angel*: "Che Oscar, my friend, the mark of moral courage resides in being able to see what is correct and carrying it out with firm resolution, in spite of the majority's opinion". And from musical mentor Hermeto Pascoal, who appeared in my life during a crucial moment, when I became a professional musician back in 1980. He was the driving force, the inspiration, and gave me the enthusiasm necessary to take this step.

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MH: The jazz scene there is small, although it has generated several of the greatest artists on the international scene. But the orchestral scene is vibrant, with youth orchestras and symphonies in every city. Gustav Dudamel, the new conductor of the LA Philharmonic is from this background. The tour I did there was of my music for jazz quintet and orchestra. So we worked with four different symphonies, in four cities. It was sponsored by the U.S. embassy – I was officially a “Culture Connect Envoy.” When Cesar Chavez learned our performance with a Venezuelan public orchestra was associated with the US embassy he prevented it – we had to use another orchestra with no government ties. Fortunately it was relatively easy to get another orchestra from the many in Caracas. That was such a great tour – I learned a lot about compassion and openness.

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With Hermeto I learned among other things about the humor, the joy of music. And that everything, the sound of people, cities, and animals are part of it. I also learned from him that to perform is a celebration that does not end when one steps off the stage. Life on stage or offstage means the same to Hermeto and that is something that I am working on every day.

JI: What are the personal, career, and business pitfalls we have to be wary of if we are to pursue a creative life in music?

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in music is about being a private business owner and playing general business gigs, hiring bands, and learning how to talk people into paying you to perform!

JI: If you could wave a magic wand, what kinds of

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I learn something new every day from teaching and playing music and I imagine a lifetime of discovery.

JI: Outside of music, are there any activities/hobbies that you engage in that have an affect on your playing?

TB: I am an avid fitness fan; I run and go to the gym 6 days a week. I feel like the physicality of playing an instrument, the strain it puts on your muscles and the mental concentration it takes to perform is balanced and aided by the discipline of exercise and

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JI: Outside of music, are there any activities/hobbies that you engage in that have an affect on your playing?

MF: Everything I do effects my music, but certain things effect it more profoundly. Seeing great dance, theater, and art inspire me in ways that are hard to quantify yet very deep...their impact is visceral and

JI: What's next for you? What upcoming projects are you currently working on?

MH: I have over 6 weeks left – I'm working on “Flow!” With WJO the commissions are ongoing. We're designing next season and I'm starting to think about which projects I might write for. Additionally I recently completed a project entitled “In the Wind.” This is a quieter project for piano trio with woodwinds plus some guitar, voice and harmonica. It's been waiting around for me to activate it. It may be the next recording project. When I was at MacDowell in June I took breaks from working on “Flow” by scribbling about nine sketches for singer-songwriter style songs – with lyrics. I have a lot of that swirling around inside from growing up - seems to be bubbling closer to the surface these days. And then there is all that jazz orchestra music that is waiting in the wings... This is music that is getting performed but should re-

OF: As I mentioned before during the interview, first it is to fall in love with what you do because it fuels the passion to continue on. So it is about being true to yourself because ultimately this is what people will enjoy about you. The other thing is to have an artistic mind so that all the energy and everything you generate will go in that direction, allowing you to create an artistic product. I think there are no secrets and each path is different. A lot has to do with dedication, thinking like an artist and not speculating on anything that might threaten the integrity and purity of your creation.

challenges that you experience would you eliminate or overcome?

CA: This too is a good question, but I would like to turn the focus on my own perception of the world. I am happy in life as I am learning that I can change

stretching. I know many musicians who have suffered from various playing related ailments that have been/could be alleviated from strength training and stretching. Playing an instrument puts the body in very unnatural positions for long periods with lots of strength needed. The natural way exercise and stretching can put the body back in balance and alignment is essential to continuing to be productive on the bandstand.

JI: Back in the 50s and 60s, Pannonica de Koenigswarter asked many of the most well known musicians what their 3 wishes would be. It was recently published as a book. I would like to continue this

immediate for me and somehow these experiences are trans-mutated into my own composing ... sometimes in a week, sometimes years later. Personal experiences in my life with people I love, places that have inspired me also result in compositional/musical inspirations.

JI: Back in the 50s and 60s, Pannonica de Koenigswarter asked many of the most well known musi-

ally be toured by Gotham Jazz Orchestra or mixed into a WJO tour. Most notable of this music would be “Hiding Out,” an extended work the Philadelphia Museum of Art commissioned for Gotham in 2008.

JI: What is the best advice or highest compliment you've ever received as a musician?

MH: The day before my undergrad recital of Chopin, Beethoven and other works I played through the program for my teacher and mentor Charles Schneider. He said, “It's Coming.” I've always fallen back on those words and felt reassured by telling myself that there is always room to grow. The one thing I surely know I like about myself as an artist is that my writing and playing are evolving and maturing. It helps me feel good about myself and have more trust in what I tell my students. ■

JI: If you could wave a magic wand, what kinds of challenges that you experience would you eliminate or overcome?

OF: If I could wave a magic wand first of all I would make a manager appear to help me deal with another aspect of the business I deal with for now: Emails, meetings, phone calls etc. Next I would make a booking agent appear to get me more gigs (*laughs*). And though at times I would be also tempted to want to have a magic wand to solve some technical problems with the saxophone I think I rather keep solving those myself. ■

not what I see in the world, but how I see it. I feel I have been given a life which allows me the freedom to express myself. I am energized by the interest I have been receiving from people all over the world who have contacted me in support of my record, and from peoples' enthusiasm for music in general. ■

tradition, and ask: what are your three wishes?

TB: I wish artists, of all disciplines, would continue to pursue their creative passions. We need strong, creative individuals in tough times to continue to light the torch, fan the flames, and then pass that torch to the next in line. (2) I wish for the continued support of non-artists – the audience members, museum dwellers, and financial supporters. It is a balanced cycle – art does not exist in a vacuum, we need the emotional and financial support of our arts patrons. (3) I wish for the continued mental and physical strength along with the creative fortitude to follow my passion and inspire others to follow theirs! ■

cians what their 3 wishes would be. It was recently published as a book. I would like to continue this tradition, and ask: what are your three wishes?

MF: I would wish for peace and harmony and an end to all violence/bigotry in the world. Freedom from all disease and for artists to be treated with the respect and reverence they deserve. ■