

# Bart Marantz

# *Anything* *is* Possible

By Christian Wissmuller

**C**urrently director of Jazz Studies at the acclaimed Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts (BWHSPVA) in Dallas and previously on staff at Jones County Junior College (Ellsville, Miss.) and Lake Sumter Community College (Leesburg, Fla.), Bart Marantz has been playing an active role in shaping the future of jazz for nearly three decades.





Since Bart joined the faculty at BWH-SPVA in 1983, the school has seen a number of high profile musicians matriculate including Roy Hargrove, Erika Badu, Keith Anderson, Norah Jones, and Bart's own son, Matt. The school's music department has received no fewer than 194 *DownBeat* Student Music Awards and the jazz students have performed at the Monterey Invitational National Jazz Festival, the IAJE Conference, and the White House.

As a performer, Marantz has played with the likes of Gladys Knight and the Pips, Nancy Wilson, and Frankie Valli and has toured with a number of shows, including Ray Charles and The Glenn Miller Orchestra. Additionally, Bart has contributed to a number of respected jazz periodicals and has co-authored three respected method books, *Jazz Figure Reading Studies*, *Trumpet Masterclasses*, and *Teach Jazz – A Course of Study*.

*JAZZed* recently sat down with Bart Marantz to discuss his background as a scholar, performer, and teacher of jazz.

**JAZZed: Talk a bit about your first experiences with music – as a student and as a fan.**

**Bart Marantz:** I was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1950 and moved to Miami with my family when I was seven years old. I did study music in elementary school as well as junior high school in Miami, which was where I heard a brass quintet for the first time. The group had come over to my elementary school to do an informance. The first trumpet player would become my trumpet teacher and mentor about a year later.

**JAZZed: A pretty big deal then, that performance.**

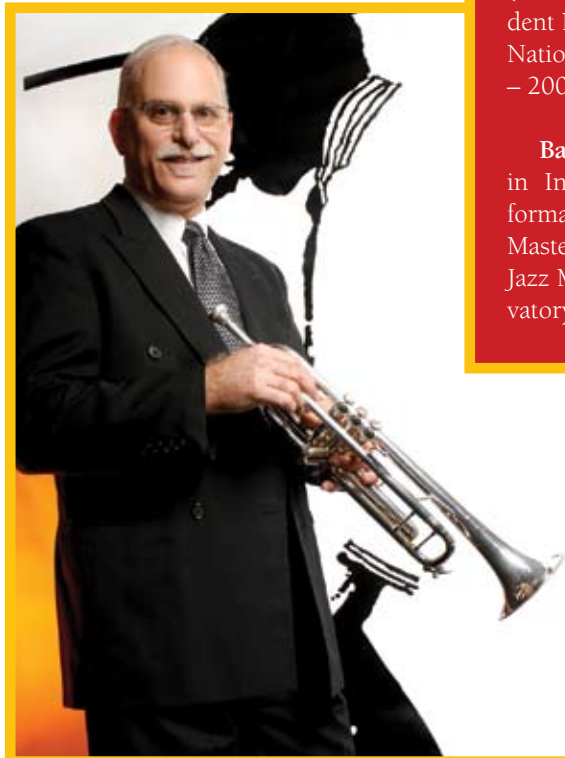
**BM:** This was strictly a coincidence, but our relationship continues today! His name is Dr. Frank Biringer. He and my Jr. high teacher, Mr. Wallace McMurry, would give me a foundation that would last me the rest of my life, both as a musician and a person.

**JAZZed: How about your high school years?**

**BM:** My high school days were my worst musical experience. The direc-

tors, all of them, did not understand jazz and commercial music and didn't make any effort to learn this wonderful art form. I felt that those who should have encouraged and supported me always looked down on me for loving this music. I played in the jazz band, then known as the stage band, the wind ensemble, the orchestra and unfortunately, the marching band.

**JAZZed: Why do it if you were so against it?**



**BM:** If I didn't do the Marching Band I couldn't participate in any of the other ensembles! They had me. Unfortunately many directors still use this policy today to populate their large ensembles, especially marching bands. Shortly after coming to Coral Park High School in Miami, I struck a deal with my band director. I would play his marching shows if I could leave after the performance, that's after half time, to go to Miami Beach to play shows at the hotels on the strip. This was the mid-'60s and it was a nine-month performance season and the large hotels with show rooms were always short on musicians. I cut my teeth on performing major shows, playing a low book in the trumpet section, learning early what it was to be a working musician.

**Bart Martantz/Booker T. Washington HSPVA Précis:**

**Web sites:** [www.dallasisd.org/btw/](http://www.dallasisd.org/btw/); [www.bartmarantz.com](http://www.bartmarantz.com)

**BTWHSPVA Accolades and Awards:** *DownBeat*/Musicfest USA Invitational National Jazz Festival (10 Awards); Monterey Invitational National Jazz Festival (Combo Winner 3 times); International Association for Jazz Education Conference (17 Performances) *DownBeat* Student Music Awards (194); Grammy National Signature School: (5 times – 2000-2008).

**Bart Marantz Education:** BM in Instrumental Jazz Studies/Performance – University of Miami; Masters Degree in Afro-American Jazz Music – New England Conservatory of Music

**JAZZed: Valuable lessons, all.**

**BM:** In my senior year – that's the 1967/1968 school year – I was the lead and jazz trumpet player for the Florida All-State Jazz Ensemble. This was a big deal back then, as there were really so few jazz programs in the US on the college level. Indiana University had the first full university degree program in the US started by Jerry Coker. The University of Miami, Berklee and a few more were running programs at that time as well. Jerry Coker was the clinician for the Florida All-State Jazz Ensemble in 1968, and after the first break in our first rehearsal, JC asked me where I was going to college. At that point I really didn't know. Jerry Coker had just moved from Indiana to start the program at the University of Miami. David Baker took over the Indiana University program handed to him by JC. Jerry offered me a full scholarship and it was a done deal.

**JAZZed: That settled that I guess.**

**BM:** [laughs] Funny, I remember him showing me his masters dissertation soon to be printed as *Improvising Jazz*, the first book of its kind in the jazz education industry. He was leaving IU to take the newly formed position at the University of Miami hired by Dr. Bill Lee, then the Dean of the University and a wonderful jazz pianist and writer. He knew that Jerry was one of those special musician/instructors who could bring the street into the classroom. Jerry has proven himself to be truly one of the all time jazz education pioneers.

I was so intrigued by JC telling me about IU, that I decided to go there for my sophomore and junior years in undergraduate school. I did this after a year between schools, touring with shows starring Dick Clark, the Smothers Brothers and the like. It was fun, but I wanted to play jazz and this certainly was not it.

**JAZZed: How was your time at Indiana University?**

**BM:** While at IU I had the privilege of studying with Bill Adam on trumpet – who at 90 years of age is still one of the all time most respected trumpet instructors – and David Baker, NEA Jazz Master, who still heads the IU jazz studies program. David was always busy and on the road himself a lot, so I hooked up with an IU alumni in New Albany, Indiana once a week for jazz lessons. His name was Jamey Aebersold. This was before the first *Play-Along!* Am I giving my age away? No, I did that before when I told you I was born in Brooklyn in 1950. The hour and a half back and forth once a week to New Albany, Indiana for my lessons with Jamey was spent listening to my 8-track recordings, allowing me to take in all my favorite jazz musicians of the day.

**JAZZed: Time well spent.**

**BM:** Time well spent, indeed. My relationship with the ABCs of jazz education remains intact to this day.

**JAZZed: The ABCs?**

**BM:** I consider these men to represent the ABCs of jazz education: Jamey Aebersold, David Baker and Jerry Coker. Dan Haerle was a big influence on me as well, as he was the assistant to Jerry Coker at the University of Miami when I was a freshman in 1968. All of these people are indirect influences on my students and all I really do is pass on the same information they gave me to our Booker T. young artists. The

interesting thing though is that these young jazz students are now receiving the same information I got as a senior in college as juniors and sometimes sophomores, in our performing arts curriculum! They are growing quicker and attaining information at a faster pace. Anything I relate to my students in the classroom at Booker T. Washington or at any of the colleges where I have taught has come directly from those four men.

Also, while at IU I had the pleasure of playing with a young drummer named





Peter Erskine and a pianist named Alan Pasqua. They are still working together at The University of Southern California in LA. This has remained an on going friendship as well.

I find all of these wonderful musicians and educators have in common an innate love for the art form – a deep commitment to jazz music

**“When students can be **convinced** that they can achieve any level of excellence if they **work hard**, it’s much easier to **go there**.”**

and a sense of never having finished the task of sharing new ideas in passing along this wonderful music. All of these men, excluding Peter and Alan, are now in their 70s and are still hard at work releasing new books, music and participating in clinics on a regular basis, sharing the music with anyone who wants to learn it.

**JAZZed: Let’s talk a bit about your experiences as a touring musician.**

**BM:** I had left the University of Miami after one year of instruction to try my hand at an offer of full time roadwork. I was out with a show at 19 performing with the Smothers Brothers, the Rhodes Brothers, and hosted by Mickey Rooney and Dick Clark. It was fun, but not jazz music and I was frustrated. We were performing in Cincinnati at the Lookout House and Buddy Rich was performing downstairs in the small room. This is where I met Frank Brown, a wonderful jazz trumpet player who hooked up with me during a week’s stay in Ohio. We went to dinner, listened to jazz, and just started hanging out together. He recommended me to Indiana University and got me into the studio of Mr. Bill Adam, who changed my life for the better as a person and musician.

After my junior year at Indiana, I found out that many of my credits from Miami, especially in the area of music theory, would not transfer. As a result I asked Dr. Bill Lee, then dean of the School of Music at the University of Miami to consider my reapplication

for scholarship and he was gracious enough to return it to me.

I had heard from David Baker some months before going back to Miami that he had heard a 17 year old guitarist at the Whita Jazz Festival who was about to rewrite the instrument. When I got to Miami I met him. He was an incoming freshman named

to say, as compared to those I would rather listen to?” After stints on the road with a number of artists including Ray Charles, I found myself wanting the other side of life: a home, children, and a chance to pass this wonderful art form on to others.

I’m old school: jazz is an oral language and I teach that way. Yes, I use printed materials and have been part of three books, but to me it’s really all about the oral side. 20 years ago, when Jeff “Tain” Watts visited Booker T. Washington HSPVA with a young 20-something trumpeter named Wynton Marsalis, I asked him where he had gone to school and he said, “I went to Berklee for a minute, but I really studied at the school of Blue Note!” I think this says it best. I think I was never interested in teaching jazz music – I just wanted, and still do want, to pass it on.

**JAZZed: A subtle distinction perhaps, but a point well made.**

**BM:** My degrees are in performance – both my undergraduate and Masters. I want to see aspiring young artists who are committed to and interested in jazz music succeed, and the way to do this is now in the classroom. I do very little “teaching” at Booker T.; it’s really a coaching gig more than anything else. There are now very few big bands and gigs to hone the blade of a jazz musician. The opportunity those avenues once presented has now gone to the performing arts high school, universities, colleges and conservatories. We are a “Peer to Peer” Arts School and are tied to The Thelonious Monk Institute along with the Brubeck Institute, of which I have been a founding faculty member since 2003, are where the final preps are now done before going on to changing the jazz industry. Festivals like the Monterey Jazz festival, and unfortunately, the now demised IAJE are and were all jumping off points for young artists inn the jazz music industry.

**JAZZed: What was your first teaching gig?**

**BM:** When I got married I came off the road and settled where my

then-girlfriend, now my wife of 30 years and the mother of my two boys, was living near her parents. I started teaching in the back room of a church and within six months I was working out of my home. This was in Hattiesburg, Mississippi – home of the University of Southern Mississippi.

**JAZZed: So the private lessons lead to other things?**

**BM:** I was seeing some great interest in private study and was gaining students pretty steadily. I was able to land a weekly column in the Hattiesburg American Newspaper, called the “Jazz Corner” and tied this into the WMSU Radio Station for a weekly jazz show using my library of vinyl. The following year I was offered an adjunct position at Jones County Community College in Laurel Mississippi. I worked for the band department and was as-



sistant to the band director teaching some jazz courses as a supplement to the band program. That year I brought in Woody Herman to do a one-night concert, which sold out, and, later that semester, I arranged a small group residency with the likes

of Bill Berry, Mundell Lowe (guitar), Lenny White (drums), Lou Levey (piano), and George Duvivier (bass). What a great few days that was! This was breaking new ground in jazz history for this part of the country at the time.

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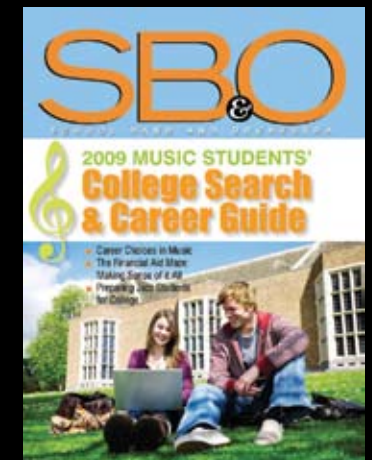
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**JAZZed: What came next in your teaching career?**

**BM:** The next year an offer came from Lake Sumter Community College in central Florida where I became head of an instrumental department with an emphasis in jazz. This was a good teaching gig, but was not a full time position in jazz studies. I had to invent ways to expand the curriculum and did this by

producing a three-day jazz festival that brought about 30 bands in from a three-state area to be adjudicated and take in some evening concerts with national jazz stars. We also had some wonderful jazz clinicians including people like Willie Thomas, John Lockwood, and Bill Dobbins. It was a high level for any area of the country and brought into the region new ideas about, and more acceptance of, jazz music.

My first month at the college I produced my first concert and at the reception the new college president told my wife and I how much he enjoyed the music, but unfortunately he was closing the fine arts department and the new facility for music would be housing a new nursing program he envisioned! He told us to start looking for prospects elsewhere, as we only had three years before the program we presently taught in would close.

**JAZZed: Your wife also taught at Lake Sumpter?**

**BM:** Yes. My wife, Sara, and I taught in the same music program and it was going to be a challenge to survive.

I then began the chore of calling friends in the jazz education business and letting them know I was looking for a gig. In July of 1983, I got a call from Willie Thomas who was doing a series of clinics at what was then known as the Dallas Arts Magnet High School. It resumed its original title, Booker T. Washington (HSPVA) some ten years later. Willie told me there was an opening at the school and the talent level was amazing. Yea, right: a high school kicking jazz to a new level. Sure!

**JAZZed: Skeptical, I guess.**

**BM:** To say the least. But, I called the school and spoke to Dr. James O. Gray, the Principal, and asked him if the school had a marching band. He laughed, and said no. I told him I was interested in the position in the music program. He had me send in my resume and support materials and I was offered an interview. We got into our trusty VW Bug and drove a thousand miles, round trip, to take the tour. Upon our arrival at the school I was most unimpressed with a building that was the worse for wear and used rags for acoustic treatment in the jazz room!

**JAZZed: Yikes.**

**BM:** My wife and I looked at each other and thought what a mistake we had made in our long journey to Dallas, Texas. After a couple of hours, which included a verbal interview and a detailed tour of the building, I was ready

to get back into our Bug and go back to Florida in hopes of finding something else that would work as a jazz education gig. Before we left the building, Dr. Douglas Cornell, department coordinator dropped the needle on their group's latest vinyl recording and after ten or so seconds I asked if I could sign a contract now or did I have to wait?

**JAZZed: It was that convincing – wow.**

**BM:** It was. I was told we would meet for dinner that evening and we could go over more details of the school and jazz studies program. I was just blown away by the talent and immediately realized the building had little to do with the program. It was all about the kids, along with the responsibility of reinforcing their musical desires with positive feedback and new ideas for direction for their futures and, in turn, the future of this wonderful music.

**JAZZed: Do any lessons learned while teaching at Booker T. Washington stick out?**

**BM:** One lesson learned from being at Booker T. Washington is that you have to remember that the gig is not about me or any other instructor. It's about the young artists who bring the future of jazz into the building every day. In doing so, these wonderful young artists have changed the future of jazz and commercial music. I really learn from all my students. I get just as much from them as I hope I am giving them. They bring a lot to the table and for some it's laying out their artistic souls. I have always seen this in Roy (Hargrove). For him, it's naked art, from the time I met him in 8th grade to the present day. Every time I hear him play he is standing in front of the world baring his inner most self. I can't say this about many artists. He is the truth.

**JAZZed: What do you find to be the most rewarding element of teaching?**

**BM:** When you see the light bulb go on and you know that a young musician has just gotten the concept you are trying to relay, it's the best. I might add that when these same wonderful young artists come back and keep us posted on their progress



**Bart Marantz and Doc Severinsen.**

it's just so rewarding. Once in a while I'll hear from a former student with a thank you letter or e-mail. These updates on their successes keep me aware that we are making a real difference and it reinforces the notion that we need to continue the effort in moving forward with our youth.

**JAZZed: Ok, flip that question on its back – what do you find to be the most frustrating aspect of being an educator?**

**BM:** My biggest disappointment as an educator is that not all the students that you pour your time and energy into put forth the amount of effort that you would like to see in return. Of course, some of those that didn't show that much interest in pursuing jazz have gone on to successes in other musical genres, such as rock and pop, and I'm proud for them, as well. But motivating the underachiever is a difficult and often disappointing task.

Also, I would have to say that dealing with difficult parents is always an

Again, I would have to add in the frustrations of having to fill out countless amounts of "paperwork" to comply with administrative policies and the difficulty in raising the monies needed to give my students more opportunities to travel and participate in worthwhile educational events. In that vein, I would like to say a special thank you and express my admiration for The Thelonius Monk Institute and JB Dyas. For several years they have stepped in to fill this "financial gap" by sponsoring our Combo I's travel as a "Peer-to-Peer" group, allowing them the opportunity to serve as student educators to other jazz students around the country. It is a unique and highly effective concept, and I applaud them for their ingenuity and commitment to jazz education. This same Institute has also funded monthly clinics at our school, enabling me to invite in our local jazz greats, including many of the noted jazz professors at the University of North Texas, along with a wonderful mix of our successful alumni. So, I may have started out lamenting my disappointments as an educator, only to end on a positive note!

**JAZZed: "Jazz," as a topic is perhaps more prevalent in jr. high and high school music programs than it once was, but for many music teachers it's still an unknown quantity or "difficult" – how would you advise a music director to introduce jazz education into their overall curriculum?**

**"I think I was never interested in teaching jazz music – I just wanted, and still do want, to pass it on."**

issue. I don't so much mind the ones that seek to promote their talented child, as that just goes hand in hand with being an interested parent, but it's the ones who always take the side of the child who is not putting in the "woodshed" time to warrant a particular position or opportunity.

**BM:** Listening to the music is the essence of learning the art form. My first experience in jazz was hearing a recording at a friend's house and becoming overwhelmed by what I heard. I was ten years old and never looked back. Bring in recordings of great and exciting "jazz" artists. Here is where the

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crossroad divides the future for a program. Some directors don't really know about hardcore jazz music and think that crossover or fusion music along with funk is jazz music. There is a way to teach this art form and it all starts with Louis Armstrong and evolves from him. Of course, it's important to introduce Buddy Bolden and all the early names to youngsters, but to hook them in one needs to let them hear Bird, Art Blakey, Horace Silver or some big bands like Woody Herman, Duke Ellington and Stan Kenton. They need to hear something that will capture their imagination and show them what they can become. Even the RH Factor, Roy Hargrove, can be a hook for these kids if the director will go back and allow them to hear Roy play with his trio on Parkers Mood and then something as beautiful as Moment to Moment where Roy is playing with strings. Man, how could you miss with those albums?

Teaching the inner workings of jazz theory comes later and should start with the major scales and keys. From here I use the modes to expand the theory these students already know. I use three approaches. Horizontal - scales, vertical - chords, and the combination of both, patterns based on scales and chords within the key of the moment. An example would be C7 a V7 chord (mixolydian mode) allowing the key center of F Major. This allows the young student to visualize these concepts when using chord changes and eventually gives them the freedom of just reacting to a key center for colors and ideas.

*Teaching Jazz: A Course of Study* gives a daily lesson plan that can be used by any teacher who needs help with putting together a plan for teaching jazz. It also gives these concepts listed above and many more including a listing of essential audio and video. The book was produced a number of years ago and took a long time to get into the jazz education market, but in most areas it is still fresh with ideas and teaching concepts.

**JAZZed: What are some of the highlights of your career as an educator?**

BM: There have been wonderful trips to Montreux Switzerland, The

IAJE Conference all over the nation and Canada, going down to Miami for the NFAA, working with and learning from the above mentioned alumni, but visiting the White House in 2004 when now alumni, Matt Marantz performed with the New Generation II under the direction of Dr. Billy Taylor has to be the highlight of my 25 years at "ARTS." Matt was part of a group that performed with Dr. Taylor earlier in 2004 at the Kennedy Center in Washington DC and this was a performance with the same group for the NEA Jazz Masters Series. Enjoying the rehearsal at the Kennedy Center, having private time with the President and Mrs. Bush in the Blue Room, and experiencing the performance in the East Wing of the White House was surreal.

**JAZZed: Booker T. Washington's music program has achieved so much – notably all of the *DownBeat* awards. To what do you attribute the school's and the students' success?**

BM: The "DownBeat Student Music Awards" have been a magical ride. We won our first award in 1983, the year I arrived, but the preparation for the first win was done the year prior. I did see, though, that this very motivating award was a way to get our kids out into the public eye by allowing their talent to be documented by one of the most respected jazz periodicals on the market. I remember buying a *DownBeat* in Africa in 1989, as a Fullbright scholar working in part with Darius Brubeck, and realized at that time the importance of having this "world magazine" publicize and promote our talented students. Our kids are self-motivated, knowing that if they are prepared to play at the highest levels of jazz and commercial music, the sky is the limit. We, as a faculty try our best to prepare materials that allow our kids to audition with top of the line technology. Of course they have to prepare for the opportunity, but the many accolades and awards all prove our students to be hard working artists who take their music seriously.

My teaching philosophy is simple: Anything is possible. I use the three Ds: Desire, Discipline, and Dedication. When students can be convinced that they can achieve any level of excellence if they work hard, it's much easier to go there. I remind them that there are no grantees and that this is a

business and not a party. If they take this seriously and treat our vocation as they would if they were becoming a doctor or any profession that could change lives for the better, than they will have the right attitude to go forward. Many of them have.



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