

PETER JOHN AND ME
By Richard Stoltzman

As a parent, you know the satisfying feeling of doing something for or with your child. It can be as simple as reading a book together or playing catch. And it can be as large as getting all the way through college or maybe through life itself. But for me, as a musician, the chance to make music with my children has been the most miraculous moment of my life. Now my son, Peter John, and I are sharing the stage as equal artists speaking to each other through the music. For better or worse, many feelings often go unmentioned between parent and child. However, in the process of rehearsing, interpreting and creating music, some of the deepest emotions well up through the sounds of clarinet and piano intertwining, blending, apposing, elongating, trusting, yielding, and all the time breathing and being together through the singing sonorities.

Looking across the piano to see Peter John's concentration and joy in the moment of realizing the music is the purest of pleasures for me. From changing diapers to shooting hoops, from flying kites to parallel parking, from piggy back rides to plane rides to Japan, all my memories of our lives together rush into my heart and fill each beat with bliss. Knowing Peter John as a father knows a son and then, on stage, performing music as colleagues, a whole new human being emerges speaking through the music in lovely and surprising ways that are completely and uniquely his—this is revelation and liberation.

Because of Peter John's training as a jazz musician, he approaches the classical clarinet repertoire in a wonderfully fresh way. For instance, he hears harmonies moving in progression that illuminate interesting new directions in Debussy. He feels the pulse in time slightly differently than a classical pianist might and therefore adds a new angle to Bernstein and Gershwin. And because his *métier* is improvisation, he approaches each performance with an amazing sense of spontaneity, which I imagine bygone composers who were steeped in the tradition of improvisation, such as Bach and Mozart, would find refreshing. Perhaps most amazing of all, he breathes with me in such a way that I feel each unspoken nuance is naturally agreed upon.

When we rehearse we usually take the classical repertoire under tempo (slower than usual) so that Peter John gets to absorb the music deeply into his system. When we work on his music or on jazz improvisations he patiently guides me through the labyrinth of chord changes, symbols, rhythmic inflections, phrase directions and mood intentions. And when we finally share our explorations with audiences it is with a spirit of love and caring for each other, a sense of discovery as the music unfolds, and the knowledge that -
- though he may be able to slam dunk, I can still beat him at ping pong if he plays left handed.

Words for Father's Day 2004
Reflections on the Legacy of My Musical Family
by Peter John Stoltzman

Playing with my father was always a time that I looked forward to. When I was a child, I eagerly anticipated going out to the park to play ball as soon as he arrived home from trips, or finished practicing. After nearly breaking my father's finger with a bounce pass one day on the basketball court, playing sports together subsequently subsided. But in return, playing music together significantly increased. Each year, as I have grown as a pianist and composer, my repertoire and itinerary with my father (and family) has increased.

Audiences seem to respond to the joy we sincerely share in playing music together. To share the joy of music, to offer the blessing of music, is a truly great gift. With great love, I accept this gift from my father and my mother, and with humility and enthusiasm, I in turn offer it to audiences.

This family legacy could appear to be a burden, but in truth, for me it is neither burdensome nor obligatory. I was never forced into music as a profession. I witnessed the lifestyle of fully dedicated musicianship, but did not fully embrace it. I'll never forget my father saying, "Just practice," when I wanted to get a job with my friend at the movie theater. Still it was my mother, charting and encouraging my practicing, who helped me to maintain some semblance of discipline (or at least consistency) through years of lessons. And as the fruits of those hours came to life, the possibility of "becoming a musician" became more and more my reality.

The specifics of a path as a professional musician are still wide open for me, even after a BM in Jazz Performance from Berklee and an MM in Jazz Composition from NEC. I teach, compose, perform. I write songs and play keyboards in bands. I meditate and offer workshops on the Inner Experience of the Musician. At 27 years old (in May, 2004), my "career" is still full of unknowns.

My father's professional legacy does not define me, though with great graciousness he has included me more and more in it. My mother's life –

including years as a Waldorf* teacher, a chamber musician, a music teacher and administrator – influences my personal visions as much if not more than my father’s whirlwind solo career. I don’t need to be a “famous musician.” I don’t need to be a “great teacher” for that matter. I might even have been a *baseball player* (my childhood dream) if I had kept going – who knows! (My father and I still share a passion for the Red Sox, since we moved to Boston in 1985 – just in time for Buckner et al!).

Why am I telling you this? Because on this Father’s Day, 2004, I am grateful that achieving status (or not) holds no sway over my parents unconditional love. And that is the greatest gift a parent can offer their child. This is my parents’ true legacy.

I need not strive to surpass them, nor fear underachievement. I need only to choose my own self as best I know how, offering what I can through the vehicle of my life, one aspect of which is this incredible energy-in-manifestation we call Music. Truly, the way I know to honor my father most is to live fully (in all aspects of my life). The best advice he ever gave me: “The purpose of life is to be of service.” Amen. :)

*The Waldorf School is a type of private school that bases its method on the teachings of Rudolf Steiner, a German philosopher.