



interview with Dick Nash, as published at Hip-BoneMusic.com

Dick Nash is the epitome of a top call studio musician. He can play any style of music at the highest level, anytime, anywhere. One of the most recorded trombonists in the history of the instrument, his illustrious career has spanned over six decades. I was honored that he was willing to play on my Brass Nation CD back in 2000. I'm equally honored today to feature Dick as our bone2pick artist of the month. I hope you enjoy this interview as much as I did.—Michael Davis

MD: Like every trombonist alive, I am a huge Dick Nash fan. You have set the standard of exceptional trombone playing for decades. We are honored to feature you as our bone2pick artist of the month. Thank you for taking the time to be with us.

MD: You grew up in the Boston area. I understand that you lost both of your parents when you were very young. Can you share with us how that tragic loss shaped you as a young man and perhaps as a young musician?

DN: Thank you Mike for these kind words and for honoring me this way. Yes, I did grow up in the Boston area where there is a myriad of artistic endeavors present—the great Symphony,

New England Conservatory, Berklee (of which I'm an alumni), the art colleges, opera and a few famous clubs where I got my feet wet sitting in at age 18. My most important musical experience came from my parents in those formative years. My father was an operatic tenor who did all the Gilbert and Sullivan productions and others, but my mother was the most potent musical brain. She taught voice and piano and was a dramatic soprano who had an offer to join the Boston Opera Company but because of having three kids to bring up (Ted, Marion and me, the baby) she felt she couldn't devote the time. She died of cancer when I was 5, but I can still remember clearly her being at the piano with the whole family singing. My father died of leukemia when I was 11 and because of his loss, I was sent to a boys school named Kurn Hattin in Westminster, VT. When I arrived the head master asked me if I had ever played an instrument and I said yes I blew a note on the bugle when I was 5. He said "great", you'll be a trumpet player. So, at age 12 I started on the trumpet and really didn't have a feel for it. At age 14, the baritone horn soloist graduated and they decided to move me to that chair. The larger mouthpiece and sound was a better fit for me. When I switched over, I put the top rim of the baritone mouthpiece on the little knot that the trumpet had provided and suddenly I had very "high chops"—what they now call an upstream embouchure—little upper lip and a lot of lower lip. Some who have watched me play say I have a weird embouchure and I guess that's true. There are others who have played that way. Tommy Johnson, who also started on trumpet, Don Lusher, another trumpet starter, and Kai Winding, to name a few.



MD: You studied with legendary Boston Symphony Orchestra bass trombonist John Coffey while you were in high school and college. What playing principles of his have endured and remained important to you through the years? .

DN: I owe so much of my success to John Coffey. I was working around Boston a bit in high school and college, and with my upstream embouchure, I was able to impress a few people. There was one trombone player who recognized my deficiencies and said that I had to call John Coffey for lessons if I really wanted to play the trombone. At my first lesson, John said “Hey kid, I hear you can play high . . . show me something!” (John, on the bass trombone, could play a strong double Bb!). So I proudly put the horn to my lips and squeaked up to a high F and he said, “sounds terrible, but I’ll show you how to work with it.” His slide technique was a revelation: smooth, steady slide movement on a scale with a steady air stream, clicking the notes with the tongue, arriving at the proper position on the slide. He showed me how to really breathe. He picked a musical passage, told me to get behind him (he was a big man), put my arms around his stomach and watch what happens. Well, I think his abdomen expanded about a foot! He said to get the air down here to start and punched me (lightly) in the gut. His legend with the Symphony was prolific. Hearing

him play the William Tell Overture was astounding and on his bass trombone he played the Bolero because the 1st and 2nd players were getting old and passed it down to him. No problem. What a man!

MD: What are some of your musical memories about your time in the Army?

DN: I was in the California National Guard and one day I heard that a guy named Andre Previn was upstairs at the piano working on some music for MGM. I went up to meet him. He saw my trombone and asked if I wanted to play something. I said how about "I Got Rhythm" and I kicked it off at a pretty fast tempo. After we got done he laughed and said nice going! There were some great L.A. players in that band, in addition to Andre there was drummer Dave Alpert (Herb's brother), French Horn player Art Maeba, pianist John Williams who played for Stan Getz and Eddie Costa on vibes.

MD: It must have been a wonderful experience playing Billy May's masterful charts every night. What are your memories of your time on Billy's band?

DN: When I was discharged from the service, I went back to Boston where I was practicing a lot, but not much else. After a couple months and anxious to get going, I called my brother Ted to see if he had any suggestions. He was already busy in the LA studios and had some connections. A couple of days later an airline ticket to Denver arrived to join the Billy May Band sight unseen! How's that for action. Thank you Ted! Working for Billy was really a thrill. We all know what a genius he was and playing those arrangements was heaven. During the gigs there was a time for a slow medley and he asked me to start those off with a standard ballad. Later he said he wanted to feature me on a

number, so I suggested *How High the Moon* in G. (it ended on a high G) A part of our tour involved the Stars of Capitol Records: Sarah Vaughan, Nat King Cole, Lester Young, Charlie Mingus and Bud Powell and we were the back up band. We had a concert at Carnegie Hall and backstage Billy said that Nat Cole was in the hospital with an ulcer problem. He wanted to do my features in his place. I usually did an encore, *Tenderly* in Eb after *How High the Moon*. So how do you get to Carnegie Hall? Play with Billy May!

MD: You made the all-important move to Los Angeles in 1953. What are your first memories of that time in LA?

DN: In 1953 my high school sweetheart, Barbara Ryan (age 20) and I got married. Our honeymoon was a trip from Boston to LA. I had saved some money while with Billy May. We put a down payment on a little house near my brother in Tarzana. Some of you may be familiar with "Hoyt's Garage." That was in the San Fernando Valley and was the proving ground for any new trombone player on the scene. Tommy Pederson, Hoyt Bohannon, Joe Howard, Lloyd Ulyate, Harry Betts, Milt Bernhart, to name a few, would get together every Tuesday evening. My bank account was down to almost nothing when I got a call from the Freddy Martin office to do an audition. There were a couple of other guys involved but thank god I got the job. I found out Tommy Pederson recommended me. I must have done ok at the rehearsals. The job with Freddy was 5 nights a week at the Ambassador Hotel in Coconut Grove, where sadly Bobby Kennedy was killed. Thanks to Tommy, I was on my way.

MD: It is widely known that you were Henry Mancini's favorite trombonist. To me, your beautiful playing and his exquisite melodies are a match made in heaven. Can you describe how that relationship started, maybe share a couple favorite Mancini

stories and lastly give us your favorite Mancini soundtracks?

DN: I feel very blessed that I was able to be part of the Hollywood music scene and a big part of that was working for Henry Mancini. It all started when Henry was chosen by Blake Edwards to score the music for the *Glenn Miller Story*. Henry was the right man because he had worked with the Miller band on piano so he was very familiar with the Glenn Miller sound. There was a love theme for the movie (*Too Little Time*) and Henry used Murray MacEchern to do Jimmy Stewart's trombone playing. It was a good choice because Murray was a wonderful ballad player, bending notes for expression and feel. The Hollywood gang nicknamed him "the master painter." As it turns out, Murray wasn't available when it came time to record due to some major teeth problems. Henry called and asked me to fill in. On the recording session after one rehearsal, Henry was looking quizzically at me when he put the baton down, came to my chair, put his hand on my shoulder and asked "Dick, can you warm it up a little?" I thought he must have Murray in mind, so I abandoned my Tommy Dorsey imitation and tried to bend a few notes and get a more romantic flavor. If I have an added nuance to my playing, I must thank Henry for that.

Henry, having been a road musician, was like one of the guys. After we finished one session, Conrad Gazzo and Pete Candoli asked Henry to come to the bar with us and have a drink, which he did. After many stories and laughs, Henry said "Hey guys, I have to leave now. You know, I have an empire to take care of." We did 15 albums with him and I always had something beautiful to play. He put me on the musical map. *Peter Gunn*, *Mr. Lucky*, all the movies. He was a monumental gift to the world. You asked about my favorite score and I think it would be *Soldier In the Rain*. It was a different approach to music that showed his total

genius. We all miss him dearly!



Ted and Dick Nash

MD: I believe you made two albums with your brother Ted as the Brothers Nash. An exceptionally talented saxophonist and woodwind player, Ted seemed to enjoy a similar path to musical success that you did. Sadly, he passed away last year. Can you share with us some of your favorite musical and personal

memories of your brother?

DN: As far as Ted doing a similar thing to what I did musically, it was the other way around. From early on, long before music was in the picture, I looked up to him and always wanted to be in his presence. My parents called me Taylor, my middle name, and Ted used to call me Taylor the trailer. And I trailed him all the way to L.A.! His success in the studios was something I aspired to. He even bought me my first pro horn, a Conn 4H. Big brother comes to the rescue again! Beyond the Brothers Nash was the togetherness we shared on so many recording sessions: Henry Mancini, Billy May, Jack Elliot, Elmer Bernstein and well, too many to mention. I feel so fortunate that it all came about. His recent passing hit me very hard, as you can well imagine.

MD: You are without question one of the greatest ballad players in the history of the trombone. That said, I always felt your jazz playing was underrated. I hear a Frank Rosolino influence in your jazz playing. What was your relationship like with Frank?

DN: Oh boy! What a thrill it was to have been involved on many occasions with the one and only Frank Rosolino. Yo-Yo, the guys on the Kenton Band called him. Maybe because he was up and down or because he kept coming back? We all tried to steal from him, but only succeeded to a degree. He was so vibrant, positive and secure with a joyous personality that all of us enjoyed. . . so tragic his turn around at the end. When I was about 18, I was driving around Boston with my radio on and there was a Kenton broadcast that featured Frank on *Body and Soul*. What he played almost knocked me off the road! I said to myself “Aha, now I know what I have to do!” Many years later a small group of trombone players got together with Sue Mudge to do an interview for the ITA. Roy Main, Bill Booth, Dick Noel were there. When Sue asked me how and why I got into jazz, I told her about that incident in

Boston. My wife was there too (I lost her to cancer in 2009 after 56 wonderful years) and when I said “Aha, now I know what to do”, Barbara piped up and said “How come you didn’t do it?” Some helpmate, but that was her sense of humor. She was right, nobody could do what Frank did!

MD: I cannot imagine how many motion picture soundtracks you have played on. Do you have a number? Amongst the many brilliant composers you have worked with in your career, do you have a favorite or two?

DN: I think it’s around 2,200, including TV and film. A favorite would be Henry Mancini . . . what a surprise! I always loved to work with Jerry Goldsmith, who was very innovative and John Williams, who could write any style and sound as if he invented it. One time at Warner Bros., John told the band we had to be 1920. Shelly Manne said “What month?” That was Shelly. Alfred and Lionel Newman, Earle Hagen, Johnny Mandel—it goes on. The talent in this town is enormous and I am so lucky to be a part of it!

MD: I was honored to have you, Lloyd Ulyate and George Roberts play on my *Brass Nation* CD. There must have been countless recording sessions that featured the three of you as a section. Would you share with us some of your memories of Lloyd and George?

DN: Oh! What a pair. They always made it such fun on sessions and off. Lloyd had his great sense of humor and George had that fantastic, pixie personality. They both lived in Newport Beach and rode together to gigs. With all that time together, they were like the “Odd Couple”. I have to thank George for sending me on a call for Marty Paich and Art Pepper called “Art Pepper plus Eleven.” George got the original call but was on another project. To fill in

for George on bass trombone was a large order, but somehow I got through it. Another session with Lloyd was a version of “West Side Story”. I was playing the bass trombone chair again because George was out of town. The parts were tough, complex time changes and a high C in my part. It was a struggle. On a break, Vince De Rosa, the great French horn player, came over to Lloyd and I and asked if we missed George. I said not really, I’m playing more bass trombone than ever. And Lloyd remarked “that’s why we miss him!” Thanks a lot! My wife surprised me with a party on my 50th birthday. About 150 musicians were there and Lloyd was the M.C. At one point, he was talking about my playing and said “If you want to play like Dick Nash, stick the mouthpiece on your chin and blow like hell!” There again, my embouchure came into play. It was all in good fun.



George Roberts with Barbara and Dick Nash

MD: I have worked a great deal with your son Ted in New York. Like his old man, he’s a virtuoso musician in every way. He also happens to be a great guy. I know he thinks the world of his dad.

How does it feel to see your son achieve the tremendous success that he has?

DN: Nachus and Ovell (pride and joy). To see him develop starting at age 5 on the piano was a treat both Barbara and I reveled in. He never missed a practice session, maybe he felt it was important in the future. After a few years I told him it was about time to start working on a wind instrument. I had a gold plated 2B I wasn't using so we said let's give it a try. His first notes were awful and he had the worst looking embouchere (not upstream), but I thought he may be able to work it out. He had visited some kid at school who showed him his clarinet. He said he wanted to drop the trombone for the clarinet. It was like a duck in water, got a nice sound right away and he looked very happy about it. In Jr. High band he went from last chair to first chair in one year. After one of the band concerts as he was leaving, a woman came up to him and said "you better be good with the name Ted Nash", obviously aware of my brother. He has his uncle's tenor sax. Yes, it is very exciting to have a son with all those accomplishments. He was up for an Emmy award for one of his compositions for Wynton Marsalis. He's way ahead of anything I could do.

MD: Looking back on your extraordinary career, is there anything you would do differently if you could do it all again?

DN: Nothing! Except correcting quite a few bad notes. Things that made me so grateful and proud are the tributes I've experienced; the New York Brass Conference, the ITA Award, along with a lifetime achievement award and just recently the LA brass society had a big party for me. Other than that, nothing much happened. Hah!

MD: If there was one playing tip you would pass along to every

trombone player reading this interview, what would it be?

DN: I would suggest that person take stock in what his or her real strengths are and develop them to the fullest and work even harder to correct any weaknesses. We all have them and one has to go after them full bore to complete the picture. Be honest with yourself and don't sluff them off. Listen to a lot of different players and appreciate what they are doing and why they are doing it.

MD: You grew up in Boston and lived much of your life in Los Angeles. Red Sox or Dodgers?

DN: Both, but if they were in the World Series I'd say "Go Red Sox!" The Sox centerfielder was my favorite ballplayer growing up. He was 5'9" – my height, and I played centerfield in high school. He had a great throwing arm, as did I, a fast runner, as was I, but I think he hit a little better than I did. . . so I took up the trombone.

One more thing I'd like to add, as if this isn't long enough. In addition to Ted, I have two other children I'm very proud of. A daughter, Nikki, who is an assistant to the director on the Conan O'Brien show and a son, Bill, who has a guitar business making new guitars look old. Bruce Springsteen has one and Metallica have several. That's it and thank you for getting this far!

MD: You are an inspiration to everyone who has ever picked up a trombone. You set a standard for the rest of us to shoot for and you do it all with class and elegance. Thank you Dick for everything you've given to our instrument and to our profession.