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ANDREA BRACHFELD

ANDREA BRACHFELD answers some questions about topics of interest regarding her professional career and her present project. Read on...

D. Navas

1. Tell us about your early years. How did your career as a musician start? Was it a conscious choice from the beginning? Why did you choose flute as your instrument?



ANDREA: "I started to play the piano at age 6, studying with a neighbor. I think at about age 10 when I was playing Slaughter on Tenth Avenue, my teacher informed my mother that I had the capacity to play jazz, as I had a lot of rhythm. It was then that I started to play the flute. No one bugged me to practice the flute the way they did the piano, which is probably why I was more inspired to play the flute. It also got me out of the regular ed classes! I became serious as a musician when I entered the Music and Art High School. I met so many wonderful musicians there, like Dave Valentin, Earl MacIntire, Nat Adderly Junior and Buddy Williams, that it was hard not to become serious. I chose the flute as an instrument because I liked the sound of it. I also liked the case it came in!"

2. What are the achievements you cheer the most in your career throughout these years?

ANDREA: "I am very proud to have been a part of the Charanga explosion in the 70's and 80's. I learned an enormous amount about playing Afro-Cuban music and the amount of musical groups who were around to listen to was phenomenal. I think I am most proud of my current CD. It has taken me a long time to find my own voice musically and then become confident enough to believe in it and myself. With this CD I have also validated myself as a composer, which is a part of my career I have never really exposed too often."

3. Looking in retrospective, what has been the most rewarding experience you have had as a musician?

ANDREA: "This is a hard question to answer to, as playing music is such an ongoing fluid experience. I think I am most rewarded each time I have connected musically and spiritually with the people I play with and for, for short or at best, long moments in time. My primary focus is always to play music more intensely each time I play."

4. What has been the worst experience?

ANDREA: "Oh, that's easy!! I walked into a club in Brooklyn when I was playing with the Benito Sextet and there was a woman on top of the bar dancing nude. When the music stopped she didn't bother to put her clothes back on, she just propositioned every man she could during the break. The guys loved it and I thought it was lewd and insulting."

5. What's your perspective about being a woman-musician in a field

usually dominated by men?



ANDREA: "My take on this has remained pretty constant throughout the years. My focus has always been to play the music, so I usually ignore anything or anyone who wants to categorize me or prevent me from doing what I want to do because of my gender. I was brought up to believe in myself enough to do whatever I wanted to do. I believe that a person's energy is a combination of male and female energy which is in constant motion so the fact that I am a woman in a male dominated world has never phased me one way or the other since my energy takes on many different forms, as does other people's, throughout the course of the day. We all have many parts to us, which manifests itself in different ways. I do what I want to do and avoid people and situations that might prevent me from doing what I want to do. I usually try to assess each situation and draw out the positive and use it to my advantage."

6. Tell us about Phoenix Rising Ensemble.

ANDREA: "Phoenix Rising developed out of a band that was hired to play at my wedding by my daughter's music teacher. Originally, we were a jazz ensemble that started to go in a musical direction I wasn't comfortable with, which was free jazz. This is not to say that I don't enjoy playing free jazz but I didn't want to play that kind of music in this band. The piano player at the time tried to take over the concept of the band. He fortunately left the band and moved to Canada before I had to fire him. It was then that I decided to try some of my more original music, which leaned more towards Afro-Cuban rhythms. This was in 1994. I had been playing with a group of musicians in the area so I asked them if they wanted to play in the band. I was at a loss as to a name so I was talking to my friend, Kenwood Dennard, who said, 'Why don't you have a name like rising from the phoenix, since you've been out of the scene for a while and now you're coming back.' I considered that and then another friend, Rick Hozza, a guitar player from the area said that the name was too long and suggested Phoenix Rising. Thank God for friends!! At this point the band has gone through a number of metamorphosis musically, as I am trying to get the sound I hear in my head. I think I am getting close with Kim Plainfield on the drums, Stefan Held on the bass, Bob Quaranta on the piano and Ray Turull on the congas and percussion. I would definitely say we have a Latin Jazz sound but there are many Influences, including Jazz, Classical and life music which are really the sounds we unconsciously hear every day."

7. One of the goals of your present musical project is to "educate the public as to what Latin Jazz is". Can you expand on that?

ANDREA: "I currently live in suburbia and many people here are not into Latin Jazz. When we play in the area, oftentimes people will come up to us and say that they really like the music but they aren't sure why. I think that it is important to play authentic music which is not commercialized and I also think it is important to reach audiences who are not aware of this music. Our society is changing and there is no doubt in my mind that the Caucasian population is declining and people from Third World cultures and countries are increasing in numbers. I believe that the most natural and powerful way to try to educate and introduce people about other cultures is through the music, so that is what we are doing."

8. What are the stories behind some of the songs from your new CD, especially Guatemala's Dance and Remembered Dreams?



ANDREA: "There is a story behind each piece of music but I will focus on the two you mentioned. Remembered Dreams was a piece I wrote a long time ago, probably 20 years ago. I



brought it out about 4 years ago and the guys laughed at it so I put it back. With my new confidence and sense of direction I brought it out again about a year ago and added the ending and Bob changed some of the harmony around. Then it became a piece I really felt good about. As we played it more and more I finally named it to really go with what was happening with my life. To play my own music with great musicians who are nice people has always been my dream and this was a dream I needed to remember again. Quatemala's Dance was a piece I wrote within the last 3 years. I always loved to play cha-chas and I also like to challenge myself with different rhythms within a composition and difficult lines to play, so I wrote this piece with the cha-cha rhythm and the melody in the bridge is a challenge for me to play. The last section of the piece reflects the more aggressive part of me when I want to hear more percussion and drums playing hard. The title came from a present that someone gave me. I was given some artwork that was painted on a piece of wood. It was labeled Quatemala, which I suppose was an incorrect spelling of Guatemala, although with all the upheaval in that part of the world for so many hundreds of years, it is quite possible that Guatemala was originally spelled with a Q by the original inhabitants of the land."