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All that jazz for kids

Saxophonist connects with children
in fun, interactive shows

By J.R. TAYLOR

It'S 1993, and Hayes Greenfield is trying to do something for kids.

In fact, he's trying to get funding for an idea he has called "For The Children" - a 16-minute video built around a song he has composed about the importance of community programs.

"I was set up with a meeting at an ad agency with this very intense woman," he recalls.

"She looked at me and said that they'd definitely do this and make the video for the song, and that they could do it in six weeks. I'd have no control and get no credit, except maybe for a 'thank you' at the end. She told me the piece would have nothing to do with my own goal, and that it would take me 2½ years to do it myself."

Greenfield looks exhausted just remembering the encounter. "I had to go home and take a nap. I woke up and decided that I couldn't do it. So it took me 2½ years to make the video. She was right."

That was a tough start to Greenfield's first try at giving back. The 49-year-old saxophonist also would give up playing and performing while working on the video.



Lombard for NEWS

**Hayes Greenfield's
'Jazz-A-Ma-Tazz'
performs in New
York schools and
around the country.**

"I supported myself doing film soundtracks," says Greenfield, who now provides the award-winning video (seen on HayesGreenfield.com) to not-for-profit groups.

Greenfield's back on the stage, but his audience has changed. Today, he's often performing in front of schoolchildren with his Jazz-A-Ma-Tazz program.

It's a live show with anywhere from three to six musicians that introduces kids to jazz - and music in general - with demonstrations ranging from scat singing to call-and-response. Jazz-A-Ma-Tazz has played internationally and routinely tours across the states, with upcoming shows in Florida and New Mexico.

Jazz-A-Ma-Tazz, however, is a uniquely Manhattan-grown product. Greenfield's followup to "For The Children" was meant to be a benefit CD consisting of celebrities performing children's songs.

"I had Herbie Hancock lined up," says Greenfield from his East Village apartment, "and thought I'd get the Three Tenors to do a lullaby. But I couldn't get the thing off the ground."

That's when a lot of unlikely things came together - beginning with Greenfield's star student.

The musician was in charge of the music department at a youth outreach center called The Door. He also was giving saxophone lessons to young people - and the occasional legendary artist.

"Roy Lichtenstein was beautiful," Greenfield recalls. "I met him when I was working on a soundtrack for a documentary about him. He started playing the saxophone at 70. He was very serious about it. He would come here for classes, and we'd go to The Door to play. It was great, because nobody knew who he was."

"I was at Roy's house in Southampton," Greenfield explains, "and he asked me what I was working on. At that point, all I'd managed for the CD was five tracks of music that I'd arranged at my house. They were children's tunes done as jazz - 'This Old Man,' 'Hush, Little Baby,' maybe 'The Muffin Man.' So there was Roy, who'd always taken common things and turned them around. He was totally into it. He'd already been so great to me. I had to tell him that I wasn't asking him to do anything for me."

Lichtenstein, however, was persistent. "He gave me the money to go into the recording studio," says Greenfield, "and then he died. He would've - he should've - been on the record."

The resultant album became 1998's Jazz-A-Ma-Tazz, billed as a work inspired by executive producer Roy Lichtenstein, who died the year before.

"His wife, Dorothy ... shares the same spirit. She wanted to carry on with the project. Miles Griffith, who sang on the album, got us a gig at the World Trade Center, and that led to another gig. People kept calling us. Dorothy funded us, underwrote the project, and now Jazz-A-Ma-Tazz is being done in schools."

His approach to jazz seems to be working in capturing the imagination of children.

"What I'm doing with Jazz-A-Ma-Tazz isn't a lecture demonstration," Greenfield explains. "Others can do that better than me. What I do is a creative, visceral, hands-on experience. I've used a Hula-Hoop to get kids moving. Sometimes I have a tap dancer."

Many local parents have seen that same creativity at work. Mark Trottenberg began as a fan of Greenfield's nightclub work, and now shares that admiration with his 5-year-old son, Sam.

"Hayes was already one of the best players in New York," says Trottenberg. "The first time my son heard him was at a Jazz-A-Ma-Tazz show at Tompkins Square Park. Sam was maybe 3 years old, and Hayes brought a microphone over to him. My son just sang into it with absolutely no fear before this amazing crowd. Now he knows what a bass is, and a saxophone. To introduce him to all that at such a young age is fantastic."

Greenfield's certainly playing for a wider audience than your average jazz musician.

"I've gotten gang members," he says, "and I've played for special ed students. I've gotten really tough kids to stand up and scat in front of everybody. Now even corporations are wanting to discuss using jazz for developing listening and nonverbal communication skills."

That might explain Greenfield's own recent inspiration to finally become an official nonprofit on his own.

"I'd like to get an alternative-energy Jazz-A-Ma-Tazz-Mobile that runs on vegetable oil. Maybe with a little stage so we can drive around and put on shows for families. That's my next project."

Greenfield also keeps working as a mainstream jazz artist. Jazz-A-Ma-Tazz has been an inspiration there, too.

"It's taught me a lot about music," says Greenfield, "in terms of reaching the audience. It took a little time, but now I have a really great trio for Jazz-A-Ma-Tazz. There's Sunny Jain on drums and Adam Roberts on bass.

"Adam just had a baby, so now we're really into it all over again. We're having fun. It's so interactive that you never really know what's going to happen. We have our bag of tricks, but it's always fresh."

Jazz-A-Ma-Tazz plays many Sundays at noon at The Bowery Poetry Club, 308 Bowery St., (212) 614-0505. For further dates and details, go to jazzamatazz.com.

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