

About Scott Healy

Bio and Credits

Scott Healy is a professional with a real resume and a real “career,” for lack of a better term. That aside, he is a creative and original voice in a world that is largely hidden to the masses, and is more magical than most would ever imagine. – Tim Reid, Music Connection

Los Angeles-based Scott Healy is a Grammy-nominated composer, producer, pianist and multi-keyboardist who multitasks across the musical spectrum. He is best-known as keyboardist in the house band for Conan O’Brien: first on Late Night in NYC, then moving out to LA in 2009 for The Tonight Show with Conan O’Brien, and now Conan on TBS, where he holds down the keyboard chair in the Basic Cable Band. Hudson City Suite by the 10-piece Scott Healy Ensemble, was released early in 2013, and garnered worldwide praise, stellar online and print reviews, national jazz radio airplay, and a Grammy nomination for Best Instrumental Composition. His latest CD, Live at Kilbourn Hall by Scott Healy with the Eastman Chamber Jazz Ensemble, was released in October, 2014. Healy is featured on the cover of the February, 2015 issue of Keyboard Magazine, and he was also featured in an “Indie Life” article in the March, 2013 issue of Downbeat Magazine.

In addition to his composing, recording, and nightly TV gig, Healy works as a hired-gun on piano, organ, electronic keyboards and accordion. He has recorded and performed with many of the greats in rock, blues, R&B and jazz: Bruce Springsteen, Bonnie Raitt, Al Green, BB King, Jackson Browne, Levon Helm, Son Seals, Hubert Sumlin and Tony Bennett, among others. He has worked as an arranger for major label releases, including scoring the big band arrangement for the 2001 Ricky Martin hit “She Bangs”.

Healy’s work reflects his classical piano, composition, conducting and orchestration training, as well as his years in the studio and on the stage, whether it be on the podium, in the band or behind the glass. His composing, arranging and scoring credits include the Portland Symphony, the Aspen Contemporary Ensemble, the Mel Lewis Orchestra, Christina Aguilera, and music for film and TV.

For a comprehensive list of film and TV scoring credits please see his [IMDB page](#).

Record producing credits include albums by his own groups—the Scott Healy Ensemble, NYC electronica supergroup The Coalition, jazz piano trio, big band and quintet music. He produces records for other artists, including the eclectic NYC singer-songwriter Max Gabriel, whose 2007 release, Exile of St. Christopher, received nationwide acclaim and radio play. They are working on a new release, Yellow Spiders, due out in the fall of 2015.

Healy is a contributing editor to Keyboard Magazine, where he wrote a long-running advice column, “Session Sensei”, and to which he continues to contribute feature articles and lessons. His blog, Professorscosco, explores various aspects of composing, listening, and arranging. He organized and leads the Ellington Study Group Los Angeles, an informal master class devoted to classical and modern jazz composition.

In addition to the Grammy nomination he has received awards from BMI, The National Endowment for the Arts, and the “Distinguished Artist” award from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.

A native of Cleveland, Ohio and an alumnus of Hawken School, Healy studied classical piano as a teenager with the now-legendary James Tannenbaum at The Cleveland Institute of Music. He then attended Eastman School of Music from which he received a degree in Composition, studying with Samuel Adler, Joseph Schwantner, Rayburn Wright and Warren Benson. He taught at the New School in NYC, and was an Associate Professor of Jazz Studies at Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville, NY from 1990 through 2001.

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SCOTT HEALY

THE GRAMMY-NOMINATED
CONAN KEYBOARDIST ON
HIS WILD MUSICAL RIDE

BY JON REGEN



SCOTT HEALY IS EQUALLY AT HOME BEHIND A HAMMOND ORGAN OR THE CONDUCTOR'S PODIUM IN A CONCERT HALL.

Best known for his quarter-century romp as the high-energy keyboardist in Conan O'Brien's television band, Healy is also a Grammy-nominated, classically trained composer of serious sonic merit. (And to top it off, he's a frequent contributor to *Keyboard*, Where does he find the time?) Healy took a break from his near nonstop rehearsal and performance schedule to talk about a musical journey that has spanned Bach to rock, and everything in between.

You've amassed a pretty staggering résumé: from your decades-long gig with Conan O'Brien to a Grammy nomination in 2014 for your album *Hudson City Suite*. How did your musical journey begin?

I grew-up in Cleveland, Ohio, in a very musical family. My grandmother was a piano teacher, my uncle played trumpet in a Dixieland band, and both of my parents played piano by ear. So there was always music in my house. My grandmother had both a Hammond M-3 organ and a Knabe grand piano in her living room, and my *other* grandmother had an upright piano, just like my family did. So I started plunking around on the piano as soon as I could reach it.

Did you study music formally?

Yeah. I started taking piano lessons in first grade, but I was already playing by ear at that point. My Dad showed me a few chords, and my Mom used to play and sing to me, so that got me into playing Broadway and other kinds of tunes. One thing that really jump-started my musical development was that I began taking piano *and* theory lessons—a half hour of each—at the Cleveland Institute of Music. Those private theory lessons taught me things like how to write notes on the staff and how to understand intervals. They were incredibly valuable, and they made me even more interested

in practicing and playing my instrument. And so I took privately for years with different teachers, until I asked around and found James Tannenbaum at the Cleveland Institute. He was an “up and coming” concert pianist and really kicked my butt. He got me going on Brahms, Chopin, Debussy, and Bach.

So you were heavily into classical music back then?

I was mainly a classical pianist until the age of 15, but I listened to everything. When I was 13, I started listening to a lot of jazz and fusion music. And growing up in Cleveland, there was no shortage of rock 'n' roll. It was in my DNA, and I got an education in it listening to radio stations like WGAR, WOR, and WMMS. By the time I was 14, I started buying all kinds of records. But as far as playing was concerned, my focus was on classical at that time. Then I took a left turn and [got into] classical composition at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York. But I still had my hands in lots of different things. I studied jazz composition with Ray Wright in graduate classes, I gigged with jazz bands and I practiced classical piano.

What did you want to do when you graduated from music school?

That was the beginning of my musical identity crisis, because on one hand I was playing jazz/

fusion gigs and music by Chick Corea and Herbie Hancock, and I had a Fender Rhodes and an ARP Odyssey. But I was still interested in all kinds of orchestration and arranging.

How did you pay your rent in those early years as a musician?

I graduated in 1982 and I moved to Bergen County, New Jersey—right outside of New York City. And I immediately started playing weddings. In fact, I think I worked the first Saturday night I got there! In those days, you could go out with your Rhodes and play left-hand bass, and people would hire you. I ended up on weddings with members of the Jazz Messengers and the Mel Lewis band. Back then, musicians played every gig they could. So I worked in all kinds of bands, playing jazz, standards, pop music, and everything in between. I was also leading my own bands—from quartets and sextets to full big bands—and scoring television commercials and “pops”-type music for symphony orchestras. I was also arranging horn charts for vocalists and “ghost-writing.” So I was doing a little bit of everything.

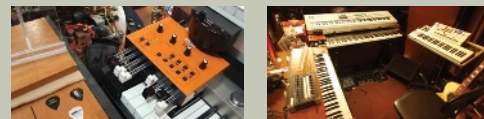
At that time, who were some of the musicians that had the biggest impact on your playing and writing?

Definitely jazz artists like [saxophonist] Michael Brecker, [trumpeter] Randy Brecker, the

CONAN'S KEYS SCOTT HEALY'S LATE-NIGHT RIG

Long time *Conan* keyboardist Scott Healy is using a streamlined rig for his television gig.

"For piano sounds, I'm using a Yamaha CP1 which I love," Healy says, "along with a Yamaha MO8 on top of it controlling a Yamaha Motif Rack for extra sounds and a Voce V5 module for organ. The Voce goes through a Hughes & Kettner Tube Rotosphere pedal for my Leslie effect. It's punchy in a way a real Leslie is not, and it's great for TV. On my left side, there's a Hohner Clavinet D6, which is pretty much original, except Ken Rich in Los Angeles replaced the pickups, and my wife replaced the strings and the felts! I also use a Korg Radias, which I sometimes use to trigger the Motif Rack as well."



band Steps Ahead, and Herbie Hancock, as well as modern musicians from the New York jazz scene of the time, like [saxophonist] John Zorn, [bassist] Mark Helias, [pianists] Fred Hersch and Kenny Werner, and [bassist] Dave Holland. I was also into electronics and early smooth jazz. The only thing I wasn't playing at that time was rock 'n' roll and blues, which is funny because they are now such integral parts of my musical identity.

What was your main keyboard rig in those days?

My main rig was a Rhodes electric piano, until the Yamaha DX7 came out. Having the DX7 and also the TX7 module allowed me to become liberated from the Rhodes. I actually had a lot of fun playing and programming the DX7, and it got me interested in other keyboards like Roland Junos, Oberheim Matrix 6R's, the Casio CZ101, and the Kurzweil K2000. Later, I bought a Pro Tools rig and started using it for scoring sessions. The Rhodes, on the other hand, was a clunky veteran of my high school days. It was heavy and huge like a boat anchor, and it had a hard action to play. Back then I was more than happy to see it go. Ironically, I sold my Rhodes in 1986, only to track it down and buy it back in 1993. Now I use it all the time.

How did your gig on *Conan* come about?

It all came from playing weddings in New Jersey! I met [*Conan* guitarist and bandleader] Jimmy Vivino on a wedding gig, and we had a great time playing together. He liked that I had a good ear and knew a bunch of tunes and styles. I knew what to do in rock and roll—I just hadn't had experience doing it. That kind of hard-edged, boogie piano style has always been in my genes since my early days in Cleveland. So in 1993, I got the call to join *Conan*'s house band, which was fronted by Bruce Springsteen drummer Max Weinberg. He and Jimmy put that band together and tapped me for the keyboard chair.

When you got the call to join the *Conan* band, how did you go about getting yourself better versed in rock and blues piano?

Max Weinberg showed up at the first rehearsal

with a couple of records for me to check out. His words to me were something along the lines of, "You're not *quite* cutting it." So he had me check out things like a "roots" piano compilation that had tunes on it like the Amos Millburn "Chicken Shack Boogie" and a few New Orleans "second line" rumbas. Max and Jimmy also wanted to play a bunch of Chicago shuffles and jump blues. So I had my work cut out for me. I had to get my left hand together, and more Dr. John and Professor Longhair kinds of right-hand riffs too. It was basically about finessing the New Orleans style and the blues. And I had about a week to figure it all out!

The first thing I did was check out the Dr. John "play-along" series, which I believe was released by Homespun on cassette tape. I also checked out a lot of records by Professor Longhair, Johnnie Johnson, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Little Richard. I learned that a Chicago shuffle is different from a Texas or a Kansas City or a New Orleans one. Learning these distinctly different piano styles is the key to understanding roots music. Jimmy was a great coach, too. He has a near encyclopaedic knowledge of the records and knows when things are right, and when they're not!

Do you remember what your keyboard rig was back in that first installment of the *Conan* show?

It was probably an old Roland RD-series digital piano, as well as a Yamaha KX88 MIDI controller, along with two Kurzweil K2000RS samplers, which I used for all synth sounds and organ.

You played organ on a weighted keyboard?

I've been playing it that way on television for 20 years, but I think as a pianist who plays a lot of organ, it actually really keeps my hands in shape. I know it seems counter-intuitive, but I've always liked to have 88 keys and feel that extra weight. Even now, I'm controlling a Voce V5 organ module from a Yamaha MO8, which is an 88-key weighted keyboard. On the *Conan* show, it wouldn't be my first choice, but as I can only have two keyboards facing the front of the stage, and I need to be able to split sounds and control another rack of synths

plus have a solid piano sound, it works.

Your song "Koko on the Boulevard" from *Hudson City Suite* was nominated for a Best Instrumental Composition Grammy in 2014. How did that project come about?

I've been writing and arranging music for various kinds of instrumental ensembles since I came to New York City in 1983-84. So while I was busy with *Conan*, I was always doing things on the side. I wanted to stay artistically challenged. There was a day when you could actually get a gig with a ten-piece band in New York City! I played a club in Greenwich Village called Visiones, where [arranger] Maria Schneider got her start, as well. I also played concerts in the Citicorp Center and Sweet Basil and all kinds of venues. So I was always writing and arranging, and when *Conan* moved to Los Angeles in 2009, I followed and wanted to get my own band together right away. By fall 2010, I was rehearsing the band that ended-up on *Hudson City Suite*. I kept writing, meeting new musicians, and performing in Los Angeles venues like Vitello's and the Blue Whale.

The *Hudson City Suite* project started years back when I lived in Jersey City, New Jersey. It was then that I had the idea to write a suite, but I never finished it. When I moved to Los Angeles, only three of the nine pieces were underway. I always had it in the back of my mind to finish the suite; I liked the idea of a full record of thematically connected tunes. So I revised and finished the nine songs for the album and recorded the suite in Los Angeles in 2012. "Koko on the Boulevard," the song that got the Grammy nomination, was one I started back in the mid 1990s.

When you speak to young music students now, what words of advice do you try to impart?

Stay open, stay interested and always say "Yes," because you never know which New Jersey wedding just may give you a 25-year television gig! 🎹



Scott Healy on
Hammond Organ TV

keyboardmag.com/february2015

Wayne Shorter *Without A Net*



DOWNBEAT

Jazz, Blues & Beyond



SCOTT HEALY

Coastal Composer

By Shaun Brady // Photo by Lisa Tanner

Conan O'Brien's very public firing from "The Tonight Show" in 2010 not only sent the talk show host to a new network; it relocated him to the opposite coast. One fact that was overlooked while the media feasted on the host's rancorous feud with NBC and Jay Leno was that when O'Brien's new show debuted on TBS, a band full of New Yorkers had been transformed into Angelenos.

Five nights a week, Scott Healy can be seen manning the keyboards for Jimmy Vivino and the Basic Cable Band, just as he had done for its predecessor, The Max Weinberg 7, since the 1993 debut of "Late Night With Conan O'Brien." The adjustment to life in Los Angeles was difficult, Healy says, but the decision to make the move was not.

"It was a fantastic, wonderful opportunity for everybody," Healy said. "We're playing great music all day long. We've developed a book with hundreds of tunes, from Beatles songs to a lot of jazz and big band stuff. We've backed hundreds of artists—from B.B. King to Bonnie Raitt to Tony Bennett to Bruce Springsteen. I love this gig."

That's not to say, however, that he doesn't miss the East Coast. Born in Cleveland, Healy graduated from Eastman School of Music (in Rochester, N.Y.) in 1982 with a degree in composition. He moved to the New York City area soon afterward. Healy takes a nostalgic look back at those years on his new CD, *Hudson City Suite*, which paints an imaginary portrait of a town that existed briefly in the mid-19th century before being absorbed into Jersey City, N.J.

"I lived in the area where Hudson City had been 130 years ago," Healy explains. "So I wondered: What would it be like today? What was it like then? I could see the vestiges of Hudson City architecture and the personality of the neighborhood, with a lot of craziness and wonderful, colorful people. A lot of soul, very walled off from the rest of the world. I spent a lot of time in this area, and it really resonated for me."

The music Healy wrote for *Hudson City Suite* is a nine-part depiction of a mythological place, a city that might be if it hadn't gone extinct more than a century ago. It unites past and present musically as well as conceptually, bridging tradi-



tional big-band swing with lithe jazz modernism.

Healy was inspired in part by his move to L.A. and in part by the suites of Duke Ellington. "The thing that I love about Ellington is his immediacy and his message," Healy says. "He wrote from the heart, but he also wrote about ideas. Everything seemed to be very personal, and I wasn't feeling *that* in my music at the time. I was doing a lot of conceptual music, and sometimes I would get lost in my own process. So I figured, 'Duke wrote about things. Let me look around and write about something.' That's when the idea of the *Hudson City Suite* evolved."

The album was recorded with a 10-piece group of L.A.-based musicians, with guest appearances by trumpeter Tim Hagans, imported from New York for the occasion. Hagans, who had recorded once before with Healy for a previously unreleased session in 1989, praised his intriguing, painterly arrangements.

"Scott has the ability to make a 10-piece ensemble sound much larger," Hagans says, "almost like a symphony orchestra. There's no

strings, but the richness is there. You can hear that he's well aware of modern classical music as well as being a jazz musician."

That earlier recording has finally seen the light of day via Healy's newly minted label, Hudson City Records. The imprint provided the opportunity to release not only Healy's latest effort, but to clear out his closet. The label's website offers digital-only releases of two older efforts, the aforementioned, never-before-issued Scott Healy Ensemble album *Song Without Words* and a rerelease of *Naked Movies*, a 2004 CD by Healy's groove- and electronica-influenced quartet The Coalition. That band also features guitarist Glenn Alexander, who co-led a 1991 quartet date with Healy that resulted in *Northern Light*, which Hudson City Records has released digitally and as a physical CD.

"It's always eaten at me that these projects never came out," Healy says. "At the time, the independent artist process wasn't really happening yet. CDs were really expensive to print, we didn't have the Internet, and I had come close to

a couple of big record deals that didn't happen. I used this music a lot to get other work, but I never put it out; that always bothered me because I felt it was really strong. Finally, it seemed like a good time to get my feet wet with a label."

The "Conan" gig was also a major reason why these releases were allowed to gather dust. Healy was acquainted with guitarist Jimmy Vivino and his saxophonist brother Jerry from working freelance studio sessions in New York. Jimmy Vivino was helping Max Weinberg assemble a band for the new TV show, and Healy got the call. "I always tell people I was really glad they didn't have auditions because I never would've gotten it," he says. "There would have been a line around the block. Jimmy and Max Weinberg called people who they knew, and who they knew could be there quickly. We became a band in a day, and that's what got us in."

During the 17 years that O'Brien was based in New York, Healy continued to supplement his income by playing as a hired gun for session and commercial work: writing film and TV scores; composing and orchestrating classical scores on commission; gigging with jazz, rock and blues bands; and teaching at the New School and Sarah Lawrence College.

That type of work continues, but to a diminished extent since the move to California. "You have to get in line out here," Healy says. "All the world-class pianists out here are pretty stiff competition, especially for a newcomer. I had deep contacts in New York."

For now, he's begun taking more session gigs on accordion, which he learned in order to accompany The Band's Levon Helm. And with the inauguration of his new label, Healy is making a renewed push to establish himself as a jazz artist. He networks with like-minded composers through the Ellington Study Group, a monthly gathering to study the scores of masters like Ellington, Thad Jones and Bob Brookmeyer. He also writes about music theory and compositional techniques at his blog, Professorscosco, hoping to one day parlay that work into a book.

The most difficult aspect is balancing all of these varied pursuits. Asked how he does it, Healy laughs and answers succinctly, "I don't." The sprawling geography of Hollywood and being forced to essentially start over have both proved to be obstacles, but he says that the wealth of experiences he's enjoyed have been worth it. What he expected to be a two-year TV run has now lasted two decades and transformed the way in which he views his own work.

"I always considered myself a composer first and a player second," he says. "But in New York I was working as a player almost exclusively, so I evolved as a player and that got me into the Conan thing and onto other people's records. I had to accept the fact that maybe I'm really a player. I like to be in the trenches, I like to be creative, I like to solo with my band, and I like to get into the live aspect of playing my own music. I think that's ended up making me a better writer."

DB

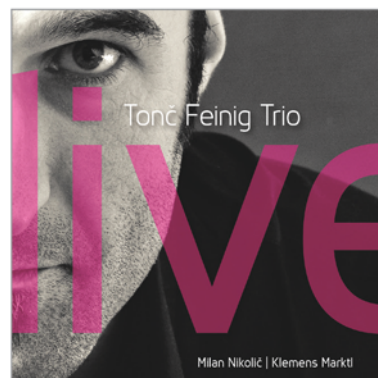


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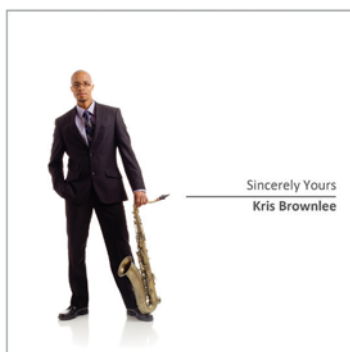


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Interview

Scott Healy

Interview by Joe Patitucci

Visit Scott Healy
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Scott Healy is the Musical Director on the Conan O'Brien Show on network TV.

JI: What are some of the lessons you've learned about business and the music business in your travels as studio musician, touring sideman, and/or independent artist?

SH: I think the most important lesson I've learned about business is to try to establish strong personal relationships with as many people as you can, whether it's employers, potential employers, peers, crew, and perhaps most importantly, yourself. How you treat yourself and your outlook about what you do is important—a positive outlook and vibe is really going to serve you well. I think everyone struggles with this, especially when first starting out, whether it's worrying too much about money, or the quality of what you're being paid to do, or the personalities of those around you. It is a struggle to keep going sometimes, looking forward, being positive and happy. It's only when you're feeling good and productive and involved in the scene that you will be open to new opportunities that pop up—and opportunities do appear, usually in the most unexpected and unpredictable ways. I always use the example of how I got the gig on *Late Night with Conan O'Brien* in 1993. The cliché is true: it was not *what* I knew, but *who* I knew, and if there had been an audition I would have never gotten the gig. I had however been playing weddings and various small club gigs with two members of the band. So who knew that playing small and ostensibly insignificant gigs would be that thing that gave me the opportunity of a lifetime! In the studio, it took me a while to learn a major lesson: give them what they want. It sounds simple, but focusing on on someone else's musical vision is a selfless skill which has to be developed. Remember, they hired you to do what you do, but what is it they think you do? I used to play on a lot of commercials on piano and B3 in NYC, and figuring out exactly what style or genre they wanted was really important. What they might consider "jazzy" could mean a multitude of things, from a quiet Basie style, to lounge piano, to bebop, to funky gospel. Figure it out on the spot and give it to them simply and directly. As an independent artist? Who knows, I'm still figuring it out. I do know from experience that it's really hard to have the split personality of a sideman and an independent artist. Being faced with the blank page is a much different feeling than collaborat-

ing with someone who has hired you for a specific gig. We're at a great time in the business for an indie artist, with the internet we can find our audience, and digital media and distribution enables us to publish just about anything for practically no money. It's great, but it requires time, perseverance, and a vision, all which are hard to get together when you're doing gigs, traveling, or in the studio with someone else. Ask me again in ten years.

JI: Could you talk about how your work as keyboardist on the network TV show, Conan O'Brien Show has challenged and/or supported your artistic pursuits and artistry?

SH: Again, managing an independent career while holding down a fulltime TV gig has been a challenge. But the show is so fun and engaging that I hardly notice the conflict anymore. Being on TV every night makes me well-known in certain circles, my increased profile has really helped me in many situations. On the other side of the coin however, I play so much rock, funk and R n B on the show, that people don't know that I play jazz, classical, and most never even suspect that I'm a composer. So I have to keep putting myself out there in the community, leading various bands, writing for performances and other artists, all to show people what I can do, and what I want to do.

JI: What did you discover about leadership, and about leading a band as a result of your work with music and pop stars such as Bruce Springsteen, Bonnie Raitt, Al Green, BB King, Jackson Browne, Levon Helm, Son Seals, Hubert Sumlin and Tony Bennett and others?

SH: I worked with a few of these artists on the Conan show, and I learned how to play a specific part, and play it well from a cold start in front of two million people. Again, focus, directness, and a real knowledge of styles is really important to being a sideman, especially in a live situation. With Springsteen I had to learn 35 tunes in just a few days, some of which I sort of knew, but most had very specific piano and organ parts I had to learn and nail. Watching Bruce I could see his total dedication and focus, and he's not afraid to rehearse—a lot if necessary—to get things right, just the way he wants it. It's worth taking the time to get the best out of a tune. Levon Helm taught me to listen to the drummer, that the piano and the drums have a link that's got to be strong. There's a difference between a Chicago shuffle and a Texas boogie, and Levon could show it you on the bandstand, but you have to be receptive to it. When you locked in with Levon, he'd lock eyes with you and smile, and you knew you were in the pocket. From all these great artists I learned that you can show your sidemen what you want, not specifically how to play it, but that a good leader knows what they want and can somehow communicate it to the band.

JI: Having attended the Eastman School of Music, what are your opinions about the benefits or shortcomings of pursuing the academic route versus performance and apprenticeship in the

music industry that have in the past pathway to a performance career in the past?

SH: I think that just going to music school doesn't necessarily mean you're pursuing an academic route. Obviously, being an apprentice in a band, on the road, or hanging in the studios as a nineteen year old would be an arguably better education than going to school, but I did learn things in school that I could get nowhere else. Plus, at Eastman, everyone was better than me, and I was pretty good. Or so I thought. A good music school enables you to take the time to hone your craft and get better fast, but also shows you the work ethic you need to compete in the music business. For me, it also gave me innumerable contacts. Also, I had the great fortune of studying arranging and composition with Ray Wright, in addition to my regular classical composition lessons with my regular teachers. Ray's assignments included writing and arranging music for 65-piece studio orchestra, having it read by a live band, and hopefully performed in concert, all very quickly, just like in the "real" world. After you do a few of those, write some big band charts, arrange vocal music, and write your regular "legit" modern classical music, you've just had a very compressed and intense apprenticeship. Not to mention studying theory and counterpoint, music history, piano, accompanying other instrumentalists, jamming and playing in bands, and practicing. My first writing gig out of college was writing pops arrangements and back-up charts for symphony orchestra, my second was arranging music for commercials. It was all a piece of cake compared to Ray's advanced arranging classes. I could conduct, read a transposed score, write for orchestra—I was ready, and I give Eastman all the credit. Plus, where else are you going to write a fugue and rehearse Stravinsky, all before lunch?

JI: How did your work as an educator at Sarah Lawrence College challenge or benefit your development as an artist and provide clarity about your own music and creative pathways?

SH: As far as learning literature, styles, and the jazz tradition, I now see my teaching at The New School and Sarah Lawrence College as a huge influence, and I wouldn't be the same writer or player if I didn't have to teach jazz history. I always had a lot of records, and I learned to play mainly from recordings, but my influences and the records I bought really were the usual—Bill Evans, Miles, Trane, Blue Note stuff, Thad Jones, Gil Evans, fusion from the seventies, a smattering of swing. I learned a lot of Monk and Ellington tunes, tons of standards, and most of the usual repertoire that players learn. Teaching jazz history forced me to really learn everything for real—not just what I liked to play or listen to—including early jazz, which really opened my head up. I always had to stay a week ahead of my students, and in the beginning I was flying blind. But I rediscovered or discovered for the first time, tons of music which I'm embarrassed to say I didn't know was there. Learning Jelly Roll Morton got me into James P. Johnson, Willie "the Lion" Smith, and Earl Hines. Wow.

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Scott Healy

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Hearing early Louis Armstrong, and listening critically to what these young guys were doing in the 20's, in *their* 20's was mind-blowing. Discovering New Orleans polyphonic music got me into that tradition, but also gave me an appreciation for everything from blues and boogie, to the Chicago and Kansas City groove, to the roots of rock n roll, to the polyphonic sound of Ornette and the "New Thing". And then I "rediscovered" Duke Ellington. He was so multi-faceted, and his long and productive career gave us such a variety of music that it's a study unto itself, and exists in parallel to the swing-bop-post bop continuum which we all know. That lead me into learning music not just from Ellington and Strayhorn, but also lead me back to mainstream swing music, then to Sun Ra and progressive and free players who suddenly jumped off into the stratosphere. All these great players informed my playing and my writing, and it's only because I had to teach, relearn, and in some cases learn for the first time, great jazz from all eras.

JJ: What kinds of advice, suggestions, words of wisdom have you received from a teacher or mentor that has influenced your artistry and or life perspectives?

SH: Playing on TV and with rock stars taught me the importance of playing "a show", communicating directly with an audience with no pre-

tense, and without expectations. I've found that good teachers and mentors don't really teach you anything, but they guide you in the right direction. Ray Wright would never tell me what to do, just see what I've done and tell me other options I had, what opportunities I may have missed. He did give me the most important piece of advice I've ever gotten, which is that a writer must respect his players. They're the ones who make your music happen. They're the ones you should be writing for. That's a lesson I learned from Ray, and from Ellington, and one I think of every time I pick up a pencil. Also, if someone tells you that you're rushing, go home and practice! As a player, the best piece of advice I've ever gotten is to do your homework. Show up knowing the music so well that you could teach a class on this guy's tune. So, with the proper amount of humility, preparedness, good attitude and ability you'll do well. Plus, in order to be in the right place at the right time, you have to *be somewhere*, so don't say "no" to anything. You never know what wedding will lead to a 20-year gig on TV.

JJ: Could you discuss the jazz artists and or recordings that most influenced your interest in this wide-ranging improvised music?

SH: Recently it's been course Duke Ellington, Sun Ra, George Russell, Gil Evans, Bob Brookmeyer—before it was the great free jazz that was happening in NYC in the 1980's, and when I was starting out it was the usual, Chick, Monk, Trane, Miles, and all the pianists, but probably mostly Herbie Hancock. He built so many

bridges between styles and eras of music, including electronic jazz, and gave us what seem like half of our modern jazz harmonies. I think that Bill Evans' musical vision is tremendously underrated, the progressive ideas like modal playing come directly from Bill. Billy Strayhorn? Recently a huge influence. But I listen to everything, not just jazz, and I know that other players and writers I know also have many influences, so many in fact that's it hard even to list them all.

JJ: Is there anything you'd like to promote or discuss that I haven't prompted you about?

SH: I'd love to promote my record, "Hudson City Suite" by the Scott Healy Ensemble. It's nine original works for 11-piece ensemble, woven together thematically into a 56-minute suite. I was thinking a lot about Ellington when I wrote this music, but it's not in a classic jazz style. I was definitely thinking about Ellington's process, and the way he wrote "about something". This is something I'd never done in my writing, and working on this piece over time opened my head up. I think it changed my perspective about the composing process. I formed a record label to distribute and market this and some of my other releases—HudsonCityRecords.com. However, I'm trying not to become too consumed with marketing, social networking and the record business, so I can spend more time writing, practicing, and gigging.



LIVE REVIEWS

Vitello's Jazz Club Studio City, CA

Contact: Jeff Sanderson, jeff@chasenpr.com, 310-274-4400

Web: <http://bluedogmusic.com>

The Players: Scott Healy, piano; Bill Wysaske, drums; Edwin Livingston, bass; Andrew Lippman, trombone; George Thatcher, bass trombone; Andrew Lippman, trombone; Brian Swartz, trumpet; Bill Churchville, trumpet; Tim McKay, bari/tenor/soprano saxes, bass clarinet; Alex Budman, tenor/soprano saxes, flutes, clarinet; Jeff Driscoll, alto/soprano saxes, flute.

Material: In the current world of electronic-driven pop music—a world that allows or even encourages artists to explore how much can be done with as few real people as possible—Scott Healy reminds us just how good live instruments can sound in a room with highly skilled crafts-men utilizing centuries-old technology. Not only is it hard to find a 10-13-piece band playing anywhere outside of a big-budget wedding or a music school, it's even more rare to find and hear this combination of instruments playing music that is fresh, new and innovative.

Healy manages to compose "jazz orchestra" music that moves forward. Two particular pieces that demonstrate his ingenuity are "#1" which toys with the concept of "free jazz" within a structured piece and impresses with its ability to take the listener in and out of order and chaos, all meticulously planned out and orchestrated. Another piece, one which was nominated for Grammy this year, "Koko On The Boulevard" resonates more with the groove-lover, as it takes one theme through a journey, sticking to a somewhat more



identifiable form and structure, but does not disappoint with the variations on the theme. As a great composition does, the music keeps the listener rooted in an idea, while constantly exploring new perspectives.

Musicianship: This caliber of musician is rare—especially in a small club. The years of study and talent required to perform this music usually means these players are paid well, or at least something, for their ability. As all professional musicians know, however, it doesn't take an economics professor to grasp that a small club gig isn't going to generate the big bucks when divided among 10 players, sound techs, the house, etc. Some pros are motivated by the art itself, however, and it's not a stretch to imagine this is the scenario with Healy's band.

Performance: A jazz supper club has the potential to be "stuffy" if that is the mood set by the performers. This was the complete opposite—we were all just in this 90-minute journey together. The players were all dressed casually, as if a bunch of friends just getting together to nonchalantly blow the minds of everyone in the house. Healy himself proved to be genuine and accessible in his moments of spoken communication with the audience. His personality went a long way toward attracting the listener to his music.

Summary: Scott Healy is a professional with a real resume and a real "career," for lack of a better term. That aside, he is a creative and original voice in a world that is largely hidden to the masses, and is more magical than most would ever imagine. — *Tim Reid, Jr.*