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LAPD Band

by Christina Challey

If you've heard the strains of Meredith Wilson's "76 Trombones," you've probably pictured a marching band. But the trombone has been used to play many styles of music, from symphonic to rock to jazz, and LAPD Band member Arturo "Art" Velasco can play them all!

Art grew up in northeast Los Angeles, where he started playing the trombone at age 14. He said it wasn't his first choice of an instrument, but he wanted to be in the Eagle Rock High School Jazz Band "soooo bad" that at the request of Mr.

Rinaldo, the band director, Art said he would play it.

After a couple of years of playing, at age 17, Art said he knew that all he wanted to do was make a living playing the trombone.

Art said both his parents enjoyed listening to music, especially his mom. He said she loved music, not just from Mexico, but from all over Latin America. "She always sang and danced," he said. "She was a great influence and had the hippest record collection." Art said his brother Albert played the trumpet in high school but has since given it up. So

Art made a lamp out of the trumpet, and said, "Albert's never forgiven me for that!"

After high school, at Los Angeles City College, Art played in every musical ensemble he could: jazz ensemble, brass quintet, wind ensemble and symphonic band. "You name it, I was there," he said. Art continued playing in many musical groups after transferring to Cal State Los Angeles, and was inspired by such famous trombone players as J.J. Johnson and James Pankow from the group Chicago.

Art went on to play professionally all over the world with some of the greatest musicians.



Art



Art with Neil Diamond.

He played for the Queen of England at Royal Albert Hall with Phil Collins; in front of the Eiffel Tower with French rock legend Johnny Hallyday; with Dizzy Gillespie while working with Poncho Sanchez's Latin Jazz Band; and with Ray Charles in South Africa. While in apartheid South Africa with Ray, Art said they played for mixed audiences at every concert, at every city. He said often South African musicians would invite them to play in their jam sessions. That's when Art realized that "musicians are the coolest people on the planet! Music brings all people together." In 2001 and until just recently, Art played and toured with Neil Diamond.

Art said his favorite style of music is Latin jazz. "To this day, it's my favorite," he said. "I spent seven years with Poncho Sanchez's Latin Jazz Band, and have had the good fortune of playing with Tito Puente, Celia Cruz and many other artists."

Art's favorite past-times include going to Disney Concert Hall and listening to "our great LA Phil." He likes to support local musicians and will often go to see them at local venues. He enjoys reading books on history,

especially ones about the history of the United States. He likes going to Dodger Stadium, and added, "Can't forget my favorite hockey team. Go Kings!"

Art said he's grateful for having had a wonderful career in music, seeing the world many times over and learning so much from all his travels. He said he loves interviewing people, which played a large part in his education. The LAPD Band is lucky Art has chosen to continue his education, sharing his incredible talent with us.

For more information about the Band, please contact Jim Starr, executive director, at snycop@aol.com. For greatly appreciated donations, please go to www.lapolicefoundation.org, and in the Notes box, put "for the Band." ♦



Art with Ray Charles.



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