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LAPD Band

by Michael Ellington

Relationships are the basis of how we feel about the things we do with our lives. Every musician in this Band I've interviewed has said something similar. This month's profile spotlights saxophonist Steve Beraha. His life journey includes not only music, but also dance and mathematics. More about that later.

The most important relationship in his life is intertwined with music. His wife, Laura Brodian Freas Beraha, is a pianist, and she and Steve play music together.

But let's go back and see how music has shaped the life and talent of this member of the reed section. Steve grew up just east of Los Angeles in the gentle hills of Montebello. His family was not particularly musical. His mother played violin in her high school orchestra. As a junior in high school, he knew he wanted to play the sax, but his parents would not rent or buy one for him. They wouldn't even pay for saxophone lessons. He had seen saxophones all his life, but the first time he touched one was because a fellow student at East Los Angeles College let him try to play hers. That was all it took.

There were some detours, however. Between fourth and sixth grades, he spent 13 months studying guitar and five months exploring the accordion. In seventh grade, he made a decision parents almost universally dread. He announced he wanted to learn how to play drums. His parents flatly refused and offered a quieter, more melodic alternative. They arranged for him to have flute lessons. He was proficient enough on that instrument to play in the marching band from the ninth through the 11th grades. His mother bought a used \$10 clarinet. That instrument

carried him through his last year in high school and into the marching band at East L.A. College.

Earlier, I mentioned that mathematics also played a big role in Steve's life. After transferring to California State University—Northridge, he graduated with a bachelor's degree in that very subject. He began a career in aerospace as a technical staff member tasked with software development.

After that 10-year stint with TRW, he went back to CSUN and completed a teaching credential in mathematics. That led to a substitute teaching position with the Los Angeles Unified School District. Transitioning to full-time teaching of computer applications, he acquired two more credentials, one in introductory music.

Steve's musical tastes are eclectic. In his words: "I like classical pop, jazz, rock and big band. I find elements of interest within each one. It's difficult to say which I like the best." He's been part of some memorable musical groups, including the Conejo Valley Community Concert Band and the L.A. Valley College Wind Ensemble.

Every musician has some sort of practice process they follow to maintain proficiency. "My practice schedule is somewhat erratic," Steve said. "I work on scales, long tones, chromatic scales and on whole pieces, either for the purpose of performance, as etudes, or just for pleasure."

Another pursuit that captures Steve's attention is vintage dance. That includes American Colonial, Victorian, ragtime, jazz age and swing. He and his wife get dressed in the costumes of the period and



Steve Beraha

dance in the English Regency style she teaches in Los Angeles.

I asked Steve why he enjoys playing music. His answer was simple: "I feel fantastic."

For more information about the Band, see our website at www.lasown.com and contact Jim Starr, executive director, at sngcop@aol.com. For greatly appreciated donations, please go to www.lapolicefoundation.org, and in the comments box, put "For the Band." ♦



Steve at LAPD recruit graduation.



Steve and Laura.

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