

## The Path to the Unknown

"Anyone interested in performing in the District VIII Honors Jazz Band this year?" asked Mr. Yeazell, my band director "Because I have all the information needed to sign-up for auditions."

For some reason, deep down inside I did not feel I had a chance at all of making the honors band, so I watched everybody else go up to obtain the application material.

Days went by, and eventually I had forgotten completely about the event, until Mr.

Yeazell once again brought it up, "Everybody involved in the District VIII Honors Jazz

Band don't forget your first practice is tomorrow down at University of Dayton. I have

maps and room numbers for those of you who have never done this before. One more thing Willie Anderson, the coordinator, asked me to see if I could get one more trombone, two trumpets, and another alto sax for the band. Anyone interested?"

Without thinking, my hand shot up like a bullet, and before I could realize what I had done, Mr. Yeazell called on me.

" Mr. Coleman, thanks for volunteering. Since I know your playing ability, I will tell

Willie that there is no need for a tryout. Besides, I think he is becoming desperate if you

ask me. You will also need to go to U.D. on Saturday for practice. Do you need a ride?"

"O.K." and "Yes," was all I was able to say. What had I done? I was not qualified to play in the honors band I stink. I had trouble playing the music in the high school jazz

band, let alone the music that was geared towards the musically gifted! The next few

hours and throughout that night, I could not think of anything but the mistakes I was

going to make on Saturday during practice. What if I screwed up? What if I was made

fun of? I didn't think I would be able to handle that kind of put-down.

That night I had a terrible nightmare. It was the first day of practice, and when I

walked into the room, I was surrounded by jazz greats like Dizzy Gillespie, Emilio Castillo, Maynard Ferguson, Wynton Marsalis, Stan Kenton, and more. They all turned

to look at me, and when they saw I was a kid, they just grumbled and went back to what

they were doing previous to me entering the room.

" Yo cat, what'cha think you're doing here?" asked Dizzy.

" I was suppose to show up here for District VIII Honors Jazz Band," I replied.

As I said that, everybody in the room started laughing. This is when I woke up, and it was Saturday morning.

Mr. Yeazell picked me up around nine, and I was off. I was comforted by the fact

that I was going to know four of the people in the band because they also came from my

school. When we arrived, people were just unpacking their instruments and getting

seated. I couldn't help but notice there were only three other trombone players in the room. About ten minutes later, a rather large, black man entered the room. He announced himself as Willie Anderson, the coordinator and director of the jazz band. He started handing out the music, and my heart even dropped further, because he handed me all the first part pieces, and the music looked tougher than I had anticipated. As we started, the room sounded like a rhino convention in a china plate museum.

"Hold it, cats," Willie said "you've got to feel the music. Don't play the notes on the page note for note. Play what you feel makes it swing. That's what jazz is all about. Now let's try again."

Hours went by, and we had made a great deal of progress. I was feeling a little more comfortable in what I was doing and how I was playing. Willie cut the band off, as he usually did when he was not pleased with the progress of the piece we were currently working on.

"Saxophones, that's a D flat through the whole piece, not just that measure. Let's try and get it right. And you," looking straight at me, fear had now risen into my heart, "What grade you in?"

Thinking he was going to bust on me if he found out I was senior, I was tempted to lie, but I told him the truth. "A senior, sir"

"What school you going to when you graduate?" Willie asked.

"Wright State," I replied.

"Damn, you're real good, I could use a trombone player like you in my band. Let me see what kind of scholarship opportunity I can dig up to get you to change your mind.

O.K.?" Willie said.

"O.K." was all I could say. Needless to say, the smile that I wore stretched from coast to coast for a couple hours.

On our premier song, "Take The A Train", the solo in the middle had been designed for the Barry sax. However, we did not have a Barry sax, so Willie was forced into improvising the solo. The next best instrument fit for the job, he explained, was a trombone, because the range in their tones are almost equivalent. So, without thinking, about it, he assigned me to the solo, just hours before the concert. The solo stretched from measure eighty-eight to measure one sixty-seven. Luckily, it was an impro solo, so that I did not have to worry about screwing up too much.

The concert started on time with a wonderful performance of the combo and the five piece string band. Now it was our turn to shine. As I walked out on stage, I looked out and saw all the people (an easy three hundred), and my courage that I had built up went shooting straight down the tubes. All my worries that I had spent the past couple

weeks

trying to keep under control came zooming back. Willie held up his hands, and as fast as my fears had come back, they went away. The first few songs had gone wonderfully, and

now "Take The A Train" was on deck. As the moment approached to my solo, my heart began to race. I could feel the sweat begin to bead up in my hands, and it seemed that

everybody in the auditorium had their eyes on me, just waiting for the chance to laugh at

me when I screw up. It felt like measure eighty-eight was coming too fast, and I realized

there was no way of running for cover. My moment of glory was coming. I stood up in

preparation of my forthcoming solo, and no sooner than when I was prepared, it was my

time. The music came from my instrument, as if an outside force was pushing and pulling the slide for me. I had never played this well before. As soon as it had started, it

was over. And all I could hear over the sound of the band were cheers and applause from

the crowd. After the concert was over, I went in search of my family in the audience. It

seemed like every time I turned around, I was receiving praise from someone on my performance. When I found my family, I received the same from them as I had from everybody else in the auditorium. During the car ride home, I had time to think about the

past couple weeks, and the way I had expected the worst, yet come out on the positive

side. Since the concert, I have had a different approach on life. Life is too short to worry

about what could happen, instead I now spend my time finding out what will happen.

