

Richard Glass: Editor and Jazz Trombonist



In a world of constant change, Richard Glass, a deputy editor at the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*, says one thing that remains the same is his love of jazz. “The music, trying to play it well, loving it—it’s a constant feature that’s always there no matter what else happens,” Glass states. “It’s kind of like an anchor for me.”

Glass’s love for music began in elementary school. He grew up in suburban Chicago in the 1950s, when, he says, children were expected to learn an instrument. Glass recalls that most boys, including him, wanted to play the trumpet, and most girls wanted to play the clarinet or flute. But when Glass met with a representative of the music company, the man told him, “Well, you’re tall and you have long arms, so you’d be good for trombone.”

The representative also said that if Glass learned to play trombone well, he would “have something really special” because good trombonists were rare. It was then that Glass decided to try the trombone.

Glass played trombone in the school band throughout elementary, junior high, and high school. In high school, he took lessons from Edward Kleinhammer, a trombonist in the Chicago Symphony. Glass says Kleinhammer was a very good teacher but very strict. “He didn’t want to hear any excuses whatsoever about mistakes or not playing well,” Glass says. “So I was always kind of anxious before I went to lessons with him . . . but it was a good experience, and I’m grateful for it.”

While studying with Kleinhammer, Glass was playing classical music but became more interested in jazz. The person who inspired him most was famous jazz trombonist JJ Johnson. Glass says Johnson had “great tone” and “wonderful technique”, but the thing that stood out most about him was how he played improvised jazz. “That was what was really inspiring,” Glass states. “I think that trying to get anywhere close to that [level of artistry] was something that was a big part of my life back then and is still now.”

In the early 1960s, when Glass attended Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, he was active in the university’s jazz band. He graduated in 1965 with a BA in biologic sciences and went on to medical school at Northwestern University in Chicago. He later did 2 years of residency in internal medicine and 3 years of residency in psychiatry at the University of Chicago Hospitals and Clinics.

Although Glass still loved jazz, he found it difficult to keep playing during medical school and eventually stopped. He says that during that era, if you attended medical school, you were expected to devote all your time to medicine.

Reunited with the Trombone

Fifteen years later, in 1980, Glass’s daughter Katie was learning to play the flute, and it inspired him to resume playing the trombone. “I had always kept my trombone when we moved and I still had it,” Glass says. “After not playing at all for about 15 years, . . . I got out the horn and was pleasantly surprised that it came back fairly quickly. I got back involved again and have really been enjoying it ever since.”

In the first year that Glass resumed playing, he played in some big bands and small groups in Chicago. He is now the lead trombonist in the Chicago Grandstand Big Band, which he has played in for more than 10 years.

Bill Gilardon, the band’s director and a fellow trombonist, met Glass about 12 years ago while they played in bands together. He and Glass became friends, and when Gilardon became the director of the Chicago Grandstand Big Band and needed a replacement for a trombonist, Glass was the first person he asked.

Gilardon says Glass is dedicated to his music and brings many new ideas to the band. “He’s very creative and very passionate,” Gilardon adds. “He loves what he’s doing, and he has a lot of energy and is very enthusiastic. You can tell where his passion is.”

The band has the standard instruments for a large jazz orchestra: five saxophones, four trumpets, four trombones, and a

Other Than Editing

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rhythm section consisting of drums, bass, and a guitar. Once a month, the band performs at a jazz club just west of Chicago called Fitzgerald's. Glass also plays with some small groups and performs at other area clubs.

Glass says he likes playing jazz not only because it sounds and feels good but also because the trombone has a much larger role than in classical music. He also particularly enjoys the improvisation in jazz. "Sometimes you have to think about what the chord progressions are and you have to make sure you stay within that, but the best times are when you can forget about that and just play whatever's in your head," Glass says. "And when that goes well, . . . that's sort of like being in the zone, and that's really a great experience and a great feeling."

Gilardon says Glass brings much to the band. "He's quite an improviser," Gilardon notes. "He has his own style and he's very musical—he's very good. And sometimes, he gets a little adventurous and he'll do some creative [improvising] that may be a little bit outside the norm, [but it] is terrific because the audiences love stuff like that."

With everyone's busy schedules, finding time to practice together is difficult, Glass says. The band used to rehearse a couple of times a month but lately hasn't been rehearsing much. He says that all the band members read music well and sometimes they play pieces for the first time together at a performance.

"That can be a little dicey sometimes, but usually it comes off pretty well," Glass says. He adds that he is typically a little bit anxious during performances, but that it is important to make sure the music does not "sound nervous". "It helps a lot to be with people you enjoy playing with and who are supportive. As a big band, we really have a good time."

Glass says playing jazz resembles in some ways his job as an editor. In playing jazz, he explains, you try to be creative in making up melodies during improvised solos, but the challenge is to do it in a way that is also correct in form. "That's what the similarity is with writing and editing—it's that you're trying to be somewhat innovative and creative but to do it with good style and good technique."

Professor and Editor

Glass's career in editing evolved from that in psychiatry and academe. Glass joined the psychiatry faculty at the University of Chicago in 1975. The chairman of the psychiatry department, Daniel Freedman, was the editor of the *Archives of General Psychiatry*, a monthly journal published by the American Medical Association (AMA), and asked Glass to become involved with the journal. Glass was the assistant editor of the *Archives of General Psychiatry* from 1980 to 1984.

Because the *Archives of General Psychiatry* is published by AMA, Glass had contacts at JAMA. In 1981, he became a peer reviewer for JAMA, and from 1987 to 1989, he was a consulting editor for it. Since 1989, he has been a deputy editor of JAMA.

As a deputy editor, Glass sees all the new submissions to the journal and assigns to reviewing editors those he thinks have publication potential. He can also reject papers immediately if he thinks they cannot make it into the journal. Although that is not the response authors hope for, at least they get the answer quickly, he says. He also recently started editing JAMA's Patient Page, which is the last page in every issue. The page explains a topic from a scientific paper in a way that is easy for the public to understand and relate to.

Glass says he has enjoyed his time at JAMA. "I'm really happy to be associated with JAMA," he says. "It's a great journal, and being able to have some role in determining the content of the journal is . . . a great experience."

Catherine D DeAngelis, editor-in-chief of JAMA, says Glass is "terrific". "He can write well, and he knows how to help [authors] take something that's pretty decent and make it into something that's very good," she says. "He works hard, he's good at what he does, and I value him very much."

DeAngelis is not surprised that he's a good musician, because he's so talented.

Although Glass now spends most of his time editing, he still spends 2 half-days a week as a clinical professor at the University of Chicago. He did not want to stop being a professor when he became an editor at JAMA, and he continues to see patients,

supervise psychiatry residents, and teach residents and medical students. "It makes my schedule pretty tight," Glass says. "I work on nights and weekends to make up for that time, but it's been worth it, and I'm happy to have been able to continue it."

Finding Time to Practice

With his busy schedule, Glass says it's sometimes difficult to find time to practice trombone. He says he learned a solution from Kleinhammer while in high school: to practice on the mouthpiece. Glass removes the mouthpiece from the horn and takes it with him wherever he goes. "What I do is keep the mouthpiece in my car, so when I'm stuck in traffic on Chicago highways, I'll play the mouthpiece," Glass says. "Sometimes I get a few strange looks from other drivers, [but] it's a really efficient and convenient way to practice in what would otherwise be downtime."

When Glass plays on the mouthpiece, he "buzzes" his lips in the same way as when normally playing, and it produces a tone. Although the sound may be a little funny, it is a good way to practice, he says. "If you can play in tune on the mouthpiece with good articulation and a reasonably clear sound, then when you put it on the horn, it's really going to sound great."

Sometimes Glass also practices at home. He says his wife, Rita, is very supportive of him and his music. "My wife has heard more trombone playing than I'm sure she would have ever expected in her life," Glass laughingly says. "But she's very tolerant about it fortunately."

Glass says he plans to continue playing jazz and work on improving his skills. "Trombone is a difficult instrument to play, and you never really feel like you master it," he says. "I try to keep on working at it and try to keep on getting better."

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