

7/25/02

Dear Sir or Madam,

After graduating from UCLA with a Bachelor's in Music, I was ready to explore some new musical avenues. My meeting with Michael Smolens coincided with this transitional time, and I am grateful that it did.

I have known Michael for about 9 years. I have performed in his vocal/instrumental ensemble, "Mirabai", and have studied with him in the areas of Jazz improvisation, Composition and Voice. As a band leader, Michael is extremely detailed, true to his concepts, but also collaborative and respectful of his musicians. In Mirabai, we sang Michael's compositions mainly, which were bold fusions of North Indian Music, Jazz, Gospel, and many forms of vocal improvisation. I was exposed to Vocal Percussion for the first time, and the North Indian Sargham (Raga Singing). The latter has been extremely valuable for my development as vocalist, musician, voice teacher and musical director.

Mr. Smolens is highly knowledgeable not only of Jazz, but Classical music, and the music of many cultures, both instrumentally and vocally. This, combined with his gifts of organization, focus and patience, make him an exceptional teacher and educator. In his Jazz Improvisation workshop, he breaks down the different aspects of playing a solo, so that the student can see more clearly where he or she is going. This organized approach is

something that pervades his philosophy, while its endpoint must certainly be musical freedom and virtuosity.

Michael is an accomplished multi-instrumentalist. His discipline as a performer has helped him reach this status. He has written a series of articles about practice habits and techniques. They have inspired me to practice daily.

Michael's instrumental compositions convey a great passion while pushing the envelope of harmony, rhythm and form. Upon hearing a live show of his recently, it was confirmed that I was listening to someone who had fully devoted himself to music.

He has demonstrated this same devotion to his students and colleagues as well. I feel comfortable asking him anything, and I consider him a mentor.

Sincerely,

David Babich

415.648.1726

davebabich@aol.com