

What was I thinking?

June 6, 2021



Gone fishing

Summer is here. Although summer doesn't officially arrive until later this month, we generally consider it summer once school is out and we're passed Memorial Day. Some of us have begun to travel and make up for trips we couldn't take last summer. As much as I would like to hang a "gone fishing" sign on my door and be gone, that's not happening just yet, but it will. Things are getting busy with another wedding this weekend.

We will have a special musical guest with us in worship this Sunday. Dr. Michael Brown will be our guest trumpeter. Dr. Brown is a native Georgian. He studied at Emmanuel College and Berry College and has masters and doctorate degrees in music education from UGA. He taught at Truett-McConnell College, served as Chair of the Division of Fine Arts at Indiana Wesleyan University, and Director of Bands at Augusta State University, and he was Department Head of Music at The Mississippi State University until his retirement in 2016. He continues to perform in his retirement, mostly in L.A. (Lower Alabama) and he is currently teaching trumpet at the University of West Florida.

Dr. Brown and I first crossed paths when I was a student of what was then called Augusta College. I was a student, and he was teaching, directing bands, and serving as principal trumpet in the Augusta Symphony. I was first a piano major and then an organ major, but word got out that I played the trumpet and Dr. Brown drafted me into the college jazz band. When the jazz band's piano player quit right before a performance, I was quickly moved into that position. My introduction into improvisation and jazz piano was memorable because we didn't get to rehearse with

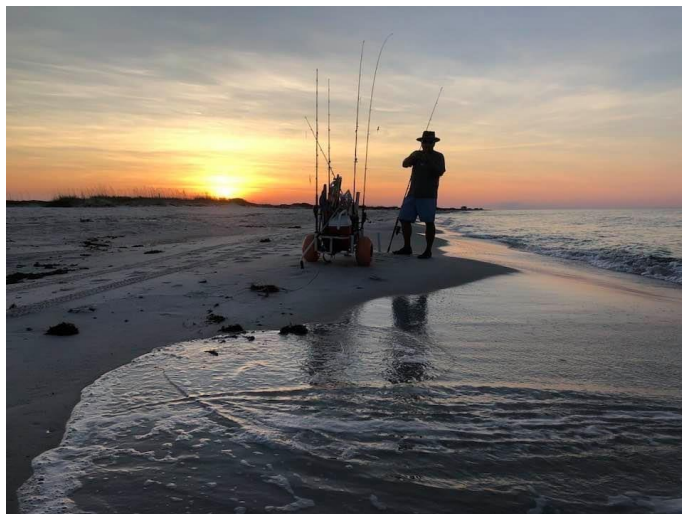
me on piano first. The “charts” as they call them in jazz were handed to me and I remember seeing all these chord symbols, and one piece started with an 8-bar piano solo. My question was, “where are the notes?” There were none, just chord symbols. That’s jazz. I also remember it was immediately after a performance of Gilbert and Sullivan’s *The Mikado* many of us were in, and I still had sprayed-on black hair that felt like pine straw. Hopefully it made me unrecognizable in that awkward first performance.

Dr. Brown started a jazz combo on the side, and I joined that as well. We played many parties, wedding receptions, fund raisers, etc. It was an adventure. One gig caused us to end up in small claims court. After our performance, the man who hired us said he thought we were a Dixieland band (we weren’t) so he stopped payment on our check and we had to go to court for our pay. I don’t think it turned out well for us, or for Dr. Brown, rather.

I graduated and moved on, eventually to Indiana, and we lost touch for a while, but then my parents told me Dr. Brown was teaching in Indiana. We reconnected and started performing organ and trumpet recitals. Dr. Brown moved on to Mississippi State and I moved to Atlanta, but we stayed in touch and continued to perform together when we could. Dr. Brown helped me with a project called Horns for Haiti, where our benefit concerts drew quite a collection of used band instruments that were sent to a school in Haiti.



Dr. Brown has retired to Gulf Shores, AL, where he continues to perform and teach when he wants to. Otherwise, he enjoys fishing and operates *Dr. Mike's School of Fish*. I envy him.



He has continued to make trips to Georgia, especially because his parents lived in Elberton. Dr. Brown's father passed away in November, but his mother is still living here. When Dr. Brown is making a trip to visit, he always asks if I have need of a trumpeter in our services, and if at all possible, I make sure we do.



Dr. Mike Brown and his father

Sunday's music will include the ethereal piece *Prayer of St. Gregory* by Alan Hovhaness, and the *Rondeau* by Jean Joseph Mouret. Those of us who are old enough may remember it as the theme from *Masterpiece Theater*.

I've been calling him "Dr. Brown" through this column. I struggle to call him "Mike" when we talk. Years have passed and I'm no longer a student. We are colleagues and friends now, but I still have a great deal of respect for Dr. Mike Brown as a teacher and I always will.

This Sunday we will have communion. We will sing the communion hymn *I Come with Joy*. The hymn starts with us singing "I come," but as the stanzas progress, the "I" changes to "we."

As Christ breaks bread and bids us share, each proud division ends.
The love that made us, makes us one, and strangers now are friends,
and strangers now are friends.

We will gather Sunday, coming from our different places, and friendships will be renewed, maybe new friendships will form. Over the summer, our travels may see us reuniting with old friends and family we haven't seen in a long time. We will probably "break bread" and share a meal or two (or more).

Gathering is something that's been hard to do for over a year now. It's something we need to do when we can. There's only so much connecting we can do over Zoom and Facebook. As we are able to safely gather, we'll reunite with friends. Then, as the hymn says:

Together met, together bound, we'll go our different ways,
and as his people in the world, we'll live and speak his praise,
we'll live and speak his praise.

God be with you till we meet again.

John