

Ray Anderson Bio

The mark of a great artist has always been to go beyond technical excellence and impart a personal vision - a sense of style and self-expression that is indelibly his own. Among modern jazz musicians, no one rises to that standard more than trombonist Ray Anderson, whose sublime mastery of the tricks of his trade is equalled by the bountiful spirit he pours into his one-of-a-kind sound.

The man who wrote *If I Ever Had a Home It Was a Slide Trombone*, one of his many original compositions, has inhabited every nook and cranny of his horn. Described by critic Gary Giddins as “one of the most compellingly original trombonists,” he is by turns a supremely lyrical player and bold texturalist, a warmly natural-sounding soloist and footloose innovator. Broadening the trombone's sonic scope with his extended techniques, brilliantly unconventional use of the plunger mute and demonstrative vocal-like tones, he played a major role in reawakening interest in the instrument in the '80s. Named five straight years as best trombonist in the Down Beat Critics Poll and declared “the most exciting slide brass player of his generation” by the Penguin Guide to Jazz on CD, Anderson has shown remarkable range. He has led or co-led a daunting assortment of tradition-minded and experimental groups, big bands, blues and funk projects and even a trombone quartet. He is recognized as an original and compelling composer and has recorded more than 70 of his own compositions with these groups. In the tradition of Louis Armstrong, he is a colorful and exuberant performer and a spirited vocalist who induces smiles with his unusual split tones and screech effects.

A native of Chicago's Hyde Park, where he was born in 1952, Anderson is the son of theologians. He took up the trombone in fourth grade, influenced by his father's Dixieland recordings. “The sound of the trombone was appealing to me,” he says. “All the people I heard play it sounded like they were having fun.” (The artists he strongly responded to, he later learned, included 'bone greats Vic Dickenson and Trummy Young.) Anderson attended the University of Chicago Lab School, where one of his classmates was another notable trombone original, George Lewis. His teachers included Frank Tirro, who went on to become dean of Yale's music school, and Dean Hey, who introduced young Ray to musicians as diverse as John Cage and Archie Shepp. As teenagers, he and Lewis were exposed to the exploratory sounds of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, with whose illustrious members Anderson later played extensively. At the same time, he had his head turned by the popular, groundbreaking sounds of James Brown, Sly Stone and Jimi Hendrix.

He played in R&B bands while attending college in Minnesota and Los Angeles and funk and Latin bands while living in San Francisco. On the West Coast, he also hooked up with three standout members of its progressive jazz community, tenor saxophonist David Murray and drummers Charles Moffett and Stanley Crouch (now a leading critic, newspaper columnist and author).

In 1973, Anderson moved to New York. He studied and played with the eminent reed player, composer and music theorist Jimmy Giuffre, joined drummer Barry Altschul's trio and played for three years with the quartet of AACM saxophone hero Anthony Braxton. In the '80s, he garnered attention with collective bands including the funk-oriented Slickaphonics and the trio BassDrumBone, featuring bassist Mark Helias and drummer Gerry Hemingway. On a series of acclaimed recordings, he has ranged

from Ellingtonia and jazz classics (Old Bottles, New Wine, with Kenny Baron, Cecil McBee and Dannie Richmond, is an album's worth of them) to striking originals including Muddy & Willie (as in Chicago blues immortals Waters and Dixon) and Raven-a-Ning (a play on Thelonious Monk's Rhythm-a-Ning) named after his son Raven).

The prolific Anderson also has demonstrated his special supportive skills on a remarkably wide assortment of albums by Braxton, Murray, Charlie Haden's Liberation Music Orchestra, Dr. John, the George Gruntz Concert Jazz Band, Luther Allison, Bennie Wallace, Henry Threadgill, Barbara Dennerlein, John Scofield, Roscoe Mitchell, the New York Composers Orchestra, Sam Rivers' Rivbea Orchestra and others.

While pushing his sound into the future, Anderson has frequently returned to his early love of New Orleans music for inspiration. Both his party going Alligatory Band and second-line-to-the-max Pocket Brass Band, featuring tuba great Bob Stewart, are rooted in the Crescent City. "I feel like a spiritual son of that city," he says. "Some part of me lives down there. Dr. John, Professor Longhair, the whole thing grabs me. You get caught up in those rhythms, right at the crossroads of jazz and funk, and you can't quit them."

Anderson also heads up the blues-dipped Lapis Lazuli Band, featuring singer/organist (and old Chicago friend) Amina Claudine Myers, and periodically reunites with Lewis, Gary Valente and Craig Harris in the all-star trombone quartet, Slideride.

As revealed by composition titles Disguise the Limit, The Alligatory Abagua, The Gahtooze and Snoo Tune (for his daughter Anabel), the trombonist is unabashedly a good-time player. But as frolicsome as his act can get, he says, "I most certainly don't play joke music. I'm much too aware of the giant shoulders I'm standing on, all the great players who have given so much to music, and the spiritual responsibility of the musician."

"I do think humor is divine. When human beings laugh or smile, they are in a state of grace. I insist on having fun when I play and if the band enjoys itself, the audience does, too. But music contains every feeling and emotion; it's ultimately an expression of love. It's the healing force of the universe, as Albert Ayler said. My music is about inclusion. I always want to bring everyone along on the trip. I want to move people also. I once described the Pocket Brass Band as having one ear cocked to the thump of the second line dancers' feet and the other tuned to the music of the spheres. That describes all my music. I want to have it all."

Anderson is a gifted teacher and has long been in demand for workshops and master classes around the world. In 2001, he was a Guest Faculty member of the Music Department at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. He was hired as the Director of Jazz Studies there in 2003. "I really enjoy teaching," he says. "As I get older I seek to serve music not only by performing but by helping to inspire the next generation. Another aspect of this aspiration is my increasing interest in composition." In response to this interest he has been awarded grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Fund for U.S. Artists at International Festivals, the Oberon Foundation and Chamber Music America. In 2001 he became a John S. Guggenheim Fellow.