

Ray Anderson **Raybone Music**

Biography

There is no prouder or more colorful fraternity of musicians than the one that distinguished founder and member Roswell Rudd dubbed the Trombone Tribe. What glorious, high-spirited, sensual sounds they make, on an instrument that is fiendishly difficult to master. Such trombone legends as J.J. Johnson, J.C. Higginbotham, Jack Teagarden, Vic Dickenson, “Tricky” Sam Nanton, Dickie Wells and Frank Rosolino have brought to jazz a daunting range of expression, creating moods and telling stories with the most deeply personal voices.

Among contemporary players, no one has carried on that tradition more winningly or inventively than Ray Anderson. For more than three decades, in an astonishing range of styles and settings, he has conjured sounds that move and delight, adding new wrinkles to jazz expression even as he celebrates jazz tradition. The trombonist has gracefully bridged swing and bop and free jazz, blues and gospel and New Orleans funk. “I feel like a spiritual son of that city,” he says.

Described by pre-eminent jazz critic Gary Giddins as “one of the most compellingly original trombonists,” and by the *Penguin Guide to Jazz on CD* as “the most exciting slide brass player of his generation,” Anderson is by turns a supremely lyrical player and footloose innovator, a bold texturalist and polished nostalgist. Since emerging from Chicago's Hyde Park in the mid '70s, he has broadened the trombone's sonic scope with his extended techniques and reawakened interest in the instrument with his musical personality, which you can instantly identify from a single plunger-muted growl or teasingly bent phrase.

"Anderson always stands ready to blow open a melody, plump each note until it bursts, turn each whisper into a scream," said online magazine Signal to Noise. "He tempers his impish, unruly tendencies with a fondness for songlike melody and funky riffs, but his solos still have an unpredictable edge." When he performs live, the unpredictability factor is maximized.

Anderson also has distinguished himself as a composer of witty, challenging tunes – nearly 100 now. As revealed by titles like "Disguise the Limit," "The Alligatory Abagua," "The Gahtooze," "If I Ever Had a Home It Was a Slide Trombone," "Raven-a-Ning" (a play on Thelonious Monk's "Rhythm-a-Ning" written for his son Raven) and "Snoo Tune" (written for his daughter Anabel), the trombonist possesses a lighthearted outlook. But as much cutting up as he does, 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.”

He has shared his gifts in a dizzying assortment of groups, including his own Slickaphonics, Alligatory Band, Pocket Brass Band and Lapis Lazuli Band (featuring Amina Claudine Myers); the longstanding cooperative trio BassDrumBone (featuring Mark Helias and Gerry Hemingway), and ensembles led by Charlie Haden, Pierre Doerge, Roscoe Mitchell, George Gruntz, David Murray, Barry Altschul, Bennie Wallace, Henry Threadgill, John Scofield, and Sam Rivers. He's a member of the all-trombone foursome SlideRide and has mastered the duo format opposite bassist Mark Dresser, tuba master Bob Stewart and guitarist Steve Salerno, a member of Anderson's quartet and quintet, who appeared on Anderson's acclaimed live recording, "Bonemeal," recorded in 2000 and released on the Raybone label.

Anderson's duties as Director of Jazz Studies at Stony Brook University have cut a bit into his recording output in recent years, and the virtual disappearance of jazz from major labels has led to his recording for a variety of independent labels. But he continues growing as an artist on record and performance stages. On the heels of his appearance on Rudd's acclaimed "Trombone Tribe" (Sunnyside) and "Hear You Say: Live in Willisau" (Intuition) his terrific co-led quartet date with longtime crony Marty Ehrlich, Anderson is marking 2011 with three equally outstanding gems: "The Other Parade" (Clean Feed), by BassDrumBone, "Love Notes," a self-released set of standards with Salerno, and "The Sweet Chicago Suite," a new Pocket Brass Band CD (also on Intuition).

Born in Chicago in 1952, Anderson is the son of theologians. He took up the trombone in fourth grade, seduced by his father's Trad-jazz recordings and the extraordinary playing of trombonists like Vic Dickenson and Trummy Young. "The sound of the trombone was appealing to me," he says. "All the people I heard play it sounded like they were having fun." At the University of Chicago Lab School, one of his classmates was another future trombone great, George Lewis. His teachers included Frank Tirro, who went on to become dean of the Yale Music School, and Dean Hey, who introduced young Ray to musicians as diverse as John Cage and Archie Shepp.

As teenagers, Anderson and Lewis were exposed to the exploratory, groundbreaking (and star-gazing) sounds of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, with whose illustrious members (notably Anthony Braxton), 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 the progressive jazz community, tenor saxophonist David Murray and drummers Charles Moffett and Stanley Crouch (now a leading critic 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 Braxton's quartet. His made his album debut on blues great Luther Allison's "Night Life" and has appeared steadily on record ever since. From the late '80s to mid '90s, he turned out a remarkable series of albums for Gramavision. He also has recorded for such prestige European labels as Enja and Hat Art.

In the spirit of Louis Armstrong, Anderson is an exuberant performer who demonstrates that being an entertainer doesn't have to compromise one's stature as a serious artist. "When human beings laugh or smile, they are in a state of grace," he says. "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."