

ST

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Saxophone Today

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Jan Berry Baker



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Thomas Erdmann



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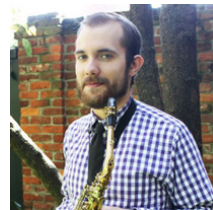
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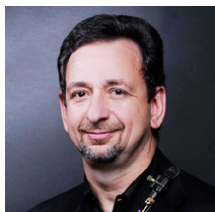
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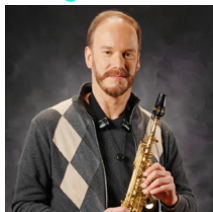
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Competition In Music

By David Camwell

Phil Pierick A Rising Star

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American Phil Pierick is a rising star in the classical saxophone world, maintaining a very busy schedule of performing, rehearsing, and teaching. Phil is a three-time prizewinner at the MTNA National Young Artist and Chamber Music Competitions (2009, 2011, 2012), took third prize in the inaugural ISSAC International Saxophone Competition, was named Vandoren Emerging Artist of 2011, and won the University of Illinois Concerto Competition in 2012. He is completing his Doctorate from the Eastman School of Music, and will be studying in Vienna this coming year under a US Student Fulbright scholarship. From July 6-19, 2014, Pierick competed in the [Fourth Jean-Marie Londeix International Saxophone Competition](#) (JMLISC), [achieving a remarkable third place](#).

Congratulations on your recent success at the Jean-Marie Londeix International Saxophone Competition in Bangkok, Thailand. How long did you need to prepare the required music for the competition?

I had performed several of the pieces in the past, so that is a hard question to answer. Each piece, new and old, took a different amount of regular practice for me. Because of other concerts and obligations, I was only able to focus exclusively on the competition repertoire for the last two months leading up to the competition.

What is a typical practice session like for you? How do you divide your time between repertoire and technique? Do you have a typical timeframe where you get mentally tired and need to take a break?

My typical practice session has changed over the years. I used to spend a larger percentage of my time focusing on scales and finger technique. These days I make sure to do long-tone, intonation and articulation exercises daily and usually limit myself to 3-4 scales a day, working on different intervals and arpeggiations. Vibrato exercises really ensure that my face stays in shape. Alternating each day, I can make it through the major and minor scales each week. I find this is enough for me, physically and mentally.

Whatever remaining time I have in a given day is devoted to the repertoire on my plate. I've never been able to procrastinate on pieces, so my time is usually split between several pieces each day. I spend a lot of time working on the small details in my practice, rarely running large sections or movements. That has always felt like a mindless waste of time to me.

I am the world's biggest fan of practice breaks, for both mental and physical reasons. Whether to have a coffee, check my email, or stretch, I find I am most productive working in 30-45 minute chunks. Otherwise, my attention wanes and my practice is less focused.

What are your thoughts on competition in music? Is it a necessary evil? A worthwhile process for the advancement of your musicianship and career? A way to raise your profile?

I have always had conflicted and complicated feelings about music competitions. On the judging side, there are all too often politics and nepotism at work. For the competitors, I have always felt it is unfair to evaluate a musician's artistry by a singular short performance under artificial circumstances. However, as a younger student, competitions taught me to set practice and performance goals and have been invaluable in introducing me to saxophonists from around the world. Listening to saxophonists with such different backgrounds play helped me to identify my preferences and goals as a saxophonist. Learning to deal with the stress of competitions has translated well to concert hall, allowing me to be more at ease in even the most uncomfortable of performance situations. All of that being said, I tend not to read much into the results of competitions.

How was the Londeix competition different from some of the others you have competed in?

Well, being in Thailand is a lot of fun! The list of competitors is truly international, meaning it is a unique opportunity to meet so many young saxophonists from around the world, and especially from Asia. The tropical weather was great for reeds but terrible for pads. This competition also has much longer breaks between rounds than any competition that I have done in the US, which is both good and bad. There is more time to micro-prepare for each round, but it is also a bit mentally and emotionally draining to be in the mindset of a competition for two weeks!

While you are performing and practicing these difficult competition pieces, what are the core musical and technical aspects that you find you always come back to?

I never think of any piece as a "competition piece." My preparation tends to be fairly uniform whether I am practicing for an academic recital, an outside concert, a competition, etc. At its core, this means always allowing the technical aspects of the piece to serve the emotional and dramatic ideas of the music. Great technique is impressive, but nearly

everyone has it. Making an audience feel something while I play is always my goal.

Many competitions have an age limit. Do you feel that performing in competitions would be harder in your mid-thirties than your mid-twenties? (career, job, family, kids, etc.)?

The difference in life situation (as you mention) has much more of an impact than age. At the JMLISC there have been competitors in their twenties with full-time jobs and families, as well as competitors in their thirties who still study and are single. It seems to me that almost everyone has a busy and multifaceted life these days.

A real benefit must be meeting all these talented saxophonists from all over the world. Please describe how this has helped you, both personally, and professionally.

The personal connections are one of the strongest reasons I recommend competitions to younger musicians. When I competed three years ago at the JMLISC, I met so many saxophonists from around the world, including several who have become great friends with whom I am still in contact almost daily. It has been great to be able to see the careers of these colleagues in Asia and Europe develop and give me ideas for planning my own future. Professionally, saxophonists I met during my first JMLISC have helped to make it possible for me to return twice since then for performing and teaching opportunities. There is no imaginable way I could have done that without having made contact with so many new people at the competition.

Do you feel that performing at such a high level in the classical side of saxophone can take away from other aspects of playing? For example, I would think that putting so much energy into classical music would leave very little time for other types of music, such as jazz, commercial, etc. However, perhaps those styles are not as much of an interest to you?

I suppose it could take away from those aspects, if they had ever been strong parts of who I am as a musician, but that is not the case for me personally. Of course, everything is a numbers game. If one has only four hours to devote to playing and thinking about saxophone in a given day, a personal prioritization is inevitable. I was once told by a (non-music) teacher to live by two rules: 1) Do whatever it is that you do very well, and 2) treat other people with kindness. By focusing on music that falls roughly in the concert or classical tradition, I am trying to do just that!

If you have a student that is wanting to begin competing in competitions, what advice do you have for them?

The same thing that my teacher Debra Richtmeyer used to say to me as a young undergraduate student: "You're not going there to win." As I mentioned earlier, there is so much to learn and gain from entering and participating in a competition and not winning. Getting caught up in the "competitive" mode easily distracts us from the music that is (hopefully) being made.

What would you like to see happen with your career in the next 3-5 years?

I plan to finish my DMA at the Eastman School of Music in the 2-3 years. After that, your guess is as good as mine. I

am very interested in having a college-level teaching job, as I have found teaching at that level during the past four years has been extremely rewarding and satisfying. I would love to start or join a regularly performing new music ensemble in that time as well. My saxophone duo with Noa Even, Ogni Suono, has many performance plans and other projects in the works over the next few years as well. §



Phil Pierick's Website

<http://philpierick.com>

Philip Pierick plays Maha Mantras by Narong Prangcharoen in final round of the 4th Annual Jean-Marie Londeix International Saxophone Competition

http://www.adolphesax.com/en/media-gallery/4516-philip-pierick-plays-maha-mantras-by-narong-prangcharoen?category_id=670