

SUMMER NAMM SUCCEEDS

FOR SUCCESSFUL MUSIC RETAILERS

AUGUST 2018
MUSICINCMAG.COM

music inc

The Laws of COSMOLOGY

How Cosmo Music
expands its universe
Page 42

From The Top
JodyJazz's
Jody Espina
on the recent
Chedeville deal
Page 38

Plus:
Best In Show highlights,
hot gear & more
Page 54



FROM THE TOP

INTERVIEWED BY MICHAEL GALLANT

JODY ESPINA | JODYJAZZ

HOW DO YOU START YOUR DAY?

I get up very early, between 5 and 5:30 a.m., and practice classical clarinet. I like getting to the office in the quiet time so I can play, just me and the mouthpieces. I'm going through a lot of prototypes right now, trying to hit different targets, and I sometimes go back through 50 prototypes to make sure I'm not missing something. There's so much study involved in getting mouthpieces to be just right.

HAVE YOU ALWAYS HAD SUCH AN EARLY SCHEDULE?

I have three young children. They're not up at 5 a.m., but I was never one of those guys who slept all day, even before I had kids. Even if I was out late playing gigs, I wanted to be up at 9 a.m., hitting the practice. Everywhere I lived, people hated me. [Laughs.] When I was on tour with Tommy Dorsey, I couldn't sleep on the bus, and we'd do at least three hit-and-runs a week. I would hang [in] the front of the bus and, as people started falling asleep, [I'd] go back and back until the guys at the very back, who were up until 4 a.m., started nodding off. Then I'd watch the sunrise. I saw a lot of the country that way.

THAT MUST HAVE BEEN A GREAT TOUR TO BE ON. HOW DID YOU START THE CAREER THAT ENDED YOU UP THERE?

I started playing clarinet at 12 in Tampa, Florida, and by 14, I knew that I wanted to be a musician. By 15, I was playing good gigs almost three nights a week with older kids. I graduated a year early, studied classical clarinet at the University of South Florida for two years, and then transferred to Berklee in Boston to focus on saxophone for the last two years. I graduated magna cum laude and had played in the top ensembles but didn't really know what to do next. Buddy Rich didn't exactly come and put me on the road.

WHAT DID YOU DO?

I bought a rail pass to Europe and traveled for a month. I ended up getting a teaching gig directing a big band in Barcelona. I was 21 and had an office, a secretary and gigs right away. It was crazy. I came back six months later, went on the road with Tommy Dorsey, went back to Barcelona for another seven months and ended up in New York City in 1984. I had a gig with a Haitian band that was going to take care of me in New York, but it fell through, so I got the first real job I'd had since mowing lawns at age 13: working at Sam Ash in Queens. At the same time, I played

in weddings, gave lessons, did some sessions, subbed on Broadway and played every style of music.

WHERE DID THE PIVOT BEGIN FROM FULL-TIME PLAYER TO ENTREPRENEUR?

I read a book called *The Artist's Way* and it got me thinking differently about working creatively in all directions. Thanks to that book, I met my mentor Santy Runyon, who was an amazing mouthpiece maker, and started JodyJazz. I tell the whole story in my TEDx Talk. As JodyJazz grew, I stopped teaching, stopped playing weddings, hired employees, and eventually moved the company to Savannah, [Georgia]. I didn't want to leave the cradle of jazz and all of the great players in New York, but ultimately for manufacturing, Savannah's been very good for us.

HOW DID YOU FIRST LEARN TO RUN A BUSINESS?

I never had business training, but I always read books like Warren Buffett's autobiography, the history of Coca-Cola, a nice, wide variety. I also used to talk to guys — especially when I lived in New York and was traveling. I'd be on airplanes next to businessmen and I'd pick their brains. This was before noise-canceling headsets when you could still talk with the person sitting next to you. [Laughs.] I didn't learn how to read a profit and loss report until I moved to Georgia in 2008 and took courses at a small business center, so in the first eight years of my business, my books were not perfect. But I was making more money than we spent, so I knew that we were doing something right.

YOU CLEARLY LEARNED ENOUGH TO MAKE JODYJAZZ A SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS.

There was a lot of luck involved and some common sense. Any business is also about assembling a good team and not being too much of a micromanager, which I was at the beginning. From day one, every word written, every product designed — that was all me. But that's not how I do things now.

CAN YOU TALK MORE ABOUT THE CURRENT TEAM ASPECT OF YOUR WORK?

As I said, luck is part of anything that's successful, and you're lucky if you have people working with you who are great. I'm really proud of this crew. My management style is that I find the right people and let them do their job. I don't have to nitpick with my sales team, operations or foreman. I keep an eye on things, but I let them run it. I also have to balance my work time with my family.



THE DETAILS

JODY ESPINA,
FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT

HQ: Savannah, Georgia

Founded: 2000

Employees: 15

Best-selling Products: HR* Series, DV Series,
Super Jet Series and Power Ring Ligatures

Fun Fact: A renowned musician who has toured
with the likes of Tommy Dorsey, Espina gave a
TEDx Talk in 2014 about choosing a career in
music and founding JodyJazz. His talk, entitled
"Creative Confidence," is available online.

I work a lot, but when I'm home, I'm not on my computer or phone at all. If not for family, I'd probably be here 80 hours per week. [Laughs.] I'm just lucky that I have great people, so I don't have to answer that many emails, for example. Everybody that I work with takes that load off of me.

OTHER THAN MANAGING THE TEAM, WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR KEY ROLES?

I'm still the creative force coming up with the vision, and I still write all of the ads myself even though I have input from other people on my team. One of my other big jobs is R & D, the whole prototyping process, and then dealing with our dealer network. Everyone knows that you can get a solid deal with JodyJazz, that we deliver when we say that we will, and that we're not going to pull the rug out with crazy models or anything unexpected. It's my job to make sure that it stays that way.

HOW DO YOU APPROACH MANUFACTURING?

We make everything here in Savannah. Some companies start with pre-made mouthpiece blanks, and that's how we were doing it at first, but it's very hard to control. In manufacturing, holding tolerance and quality are always issues, and with mouthpieces, precision is important. You're dealing with aerodynamics and vibrations. Every bit of how a mouthpiece curves affects what the player feels. We use high-tech CNC machines to get almost all of the finished shape, since we're trying to get repeatability, and then we go in with files and sandpaper and finish the rest up by hand. It's the best of both worlds.

TELL ME ABOUT THE MOTIVATION BEHIND THE RECENT ACQUISITION OF THE CHEDEVILLE MOUTHPIECE COMPANY.

The dilemma that I've had was the name of my company, JodyJazz. That name was given to me by Santy. People started using that name pretty widely, and so I stopped fighting it. But it pigeonholed what we do into jazz, and I wanted to make classical mouthpieces as well. The potential is so great and I've been working on ways to approach the classical market, but with the name JodyJazz, I've got two strikes against me. On the bright side, we have built a good reputation, even amongst classical people who know us and expect good mouthpieces.

HOW DID CHEDEVILLE COME INTO THE PICTURE?

A man named Omar Henderson approached me about this company called Chedeville, which was a famous French mouthpiece company. Before World War II, they made beautiful sounding mouthpieces, probably because of the way that they made rubber back then. What Omar did was get a vintage Chedeville mouthpiece and

do a whole analysis, which gave him a formula to recreate the original rubber. Then he bought the trademark for this company but didn't have the resources to fully get it off the ground.

AND THAT'S WHERE YOU STEPPED IN.

I was trying to solve this dilemma of how to sell classical mouthpieces and he was ready to sell, so it worked. We are not buying a whole factory as much as you might think. In some ways, we're starting from scratch. We have a scan of one of these original Chedeville mouthpieces, the trademarks in Europe, Canada and the U.S., and the rubber formula. I'm prototyping far and wide and really researching the market. We are going to come out with a small line at first and grow it from there.

I'm not going to be beholden to making an exact replica of historic Chedevilles. I'm trying to make a modern mouthpiece from old-world materials and techniques.

ARE YOU INTIMIDATED AT ALL, TAKING ON THIS NEW BRAND WITH A RELATIVELY SMALL TEAM?

It's exciting and a little terrifying, entering a new realm with this acquisition and basically starting a whole new company. But I've always been a "feelings" guy, not a bean counter, and this feels right. I think it's going to be great.

WHAT DO YOU DO FOR FUN?

Take the kids to the pool, watch movies, travel. I'm lucky that I get to combine my promotion of JodyJazz with playing sometimes. I did a tour in Germany and France with some friends from New York and did some clinics in stores at the same time.

IF NOT MUSIC, WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING?

Renewable energy and solar in particular. We are so messed up in this country. I travel all over and see what's happening in the rest of the world and we are so backward. I'd want to be doing something to change that.

'EVERYONE KNOWS THAT YOU CAN GET A SOLID DEAL WITH JODYJAZZ, THAT WE DELIVER WHEN WE SAY THAT WE WILL, AND THAT WE'RE NOT GOING TO PULL THE RUG OUT WITH CRAZY MODELS OR ANYTHING UNEXPECTED.'