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All That's Jazz: Moraga man earns a Grammy nomination

By Cathy Dausman



Alan Ferber Photo provided

It was a snowy Midwest day after New Year's, but Alan Ferber was warming his ears indoors listening to Grammy nominated music with his family. Ferber, a Campolindo High School grad and former Moraga resident, is a professional New York-based jazz trombonist who recently earned a first-time Grammy nomination for his sixth album, *March Sublime*. Released in 2013, the album almost wasn't considered because, as Ferber tells it, he missed the deadline.

Fortunately his record label, Sunnyside Records, was on the ball. And he learned only secondhand of his nomination when a friend texted him with the cryptic message "Grammy nominee."

"Who?" Ferber inquired.

"You!" his friend replied.

Although jazz musicians are noted for their improvisation, Ferber has "been at this for a while." He started piano lessons at age 4, and took up the trombone at 10, but "didn't really get serious" until he began attending Bay Area summer music camps where he discovered jazz improvisation and "fell in love with playing music."

He credits Sandi Bowen, his first piano instructor, with teaching him how to practice. Ken Bergmann, Ferber's freshman band director at Campolindo "made a big impact," too.

Bergmann "eventually got us (Ferber and his brother, percussionist Mark Ferber) involved with subbing in the Diablo Valley College night jazz band while we were in high school," he said.

Ferber graduated from UCLA with an economics degree. After interviewing for "a couple of real jobs," Ferber found "a ton of work" as a brass player during the neo-swing movement (Big Bad Voodoo Daddy, Cherry Poppin Daddies) that defined the late 1990s.

Now as a voting member of the National Association of Recording Artists, Ferber votes for all Grammy nominees,

including his own work in the Best Large Jazz Ensemble category. *March Sublime* was recorded at Brooklyn's Systems II studio.

Ferber explained that popular music recordings may take up to several weeks to produce, but jazz albums are cranked out in one or two days. "You get at most three to four takes to capture the magic," he said. He's proud that a number of cuts on the album are first takes. "We used the first take for the first tune on the first day," Ferber said, thinking "this is so easy and so much fun."

Even their recording engineer, a rather unsentimental local, was impressed.

"These guys were the reason I moved to New York City," Ferber said, explaining the band's "cohesive" sound. The recording session was also a family affair; Ferber's twin brother Mark appears on the album as percussionist.

Stanley Middle School music director Bob Athayde was thrilled to hear about Ferber's nomination. Athayde first met the musical twins when directing Campolindo's summer jazz band. Athayde said the Ferber brothers have a standing invitation as guest instructors at the Lafayette Jazz Festival because of their "raised to be humble" upbringing. "You'd think they were accountants," he said.

Still, they are "articulate, fun-loving guys," and Athayde calls Alan Ferber "one of the great musicians on the planet."

"Alan is a mentor 20 years younger than me," he said.

Ferber's wife, cellist Jody Redhag, his mother and brother, Michael, will all be his guests at the Grammys in Los Angeles Jan. 26. Ferber said, "After enduring years of annoying trombone practice routines, this is [Michael's] payoff ... he wouldn't miss it!"

When not composing or performing, Ferber teaches. He is adjunct professor of jazz trombone and composition at New York University's Steinhardt School, Johns Hopkins University's Peabody Conservatory, and Montclair State University's John J. Cali School of Music.

The 56th annual Grammy awards show airs at 8 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 26 on CBS TV. To learn more, go online to www.Grammy.com.

Alan Ferber, Sunnyside Records:

- March Sublime (2013)
- Alan Ferber (2010)
- Chamber Songs: Music for Nonet and Strings (2010)
- The Compass (2007)
- Scenes from an Exit Row (2005)
- Playground (2001)

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