

NEIGHBOURS OF

JULY 2020

# High Park & Roncesvalles



Summertime!

And the Living is Easy with Andrew McAnsh





## Summertime! And the Living is Easy with Andrew McAnsh

By Patti McCabe

When I first met Andrew he was leading the nightly pot banging sessions on Indian Grove with the sweet sound of his trumpet filling the air with the melodic sounds of *Smile* and the toe tapping toots of *When the Saints Go Marching In*. Who is this young man with a horn I wondered.

Andrew McAnsh was born May 29th, 1989 in Cambridge, ON, the only child of a Sicilian immigrant mother and an adopted father. His first exposure to music was through his father who played the drums and was a big fan of classic rock. The first instrument Andrew actually played was the drums.

In grade 9, at the age of 15, he got the opportunity to join the school band. You'd think he would have picked the drums as his instrument right? Wrong. In a cosmic twist of fate Andrew could not find the music room on the first day of class and by the time he got there the drums, his instrument of choice, were no longer available. The only instruments that were left were the flute, the clarinet or the trumpet. He chose the trumpet because he didn't want to sit at the front with all the girls! So even though the choice itself was a fluke, from that moment on he made a conscious decision to become a real student of the trumpet. He committed to being curious, disciplined and persistent in unlocking the secrets of the three buttoned brass horn. "I realized its nobility pretty early on," Andrew confessed, "I loved it immediately."

His first exposure to the arts was in high school where, in addition to the band, he also acted in school plays and joined a barbershop quartet. In hindsight he realized that this experience taught him the vital skill of collaboration. It allowed him to find his particular role and learn how to sing through someone else and how to lean on someone else – all skills that are particularly important in improv jazz sessions when players work together to produce a singular piece of art. It was also a very helpful





way to train his ear because, in Andrew's words, "as a trumpet player, since there are only three buttons and the rest is up to how you breathe and use your body, you really have to hear in your mind before the note comes out, and if you don't hear it, that's when people make mistakes."

When asked when he knew he wanted to be a musician Andrew tells the story of going to visit family in Italy when he was 16 years old. He did not bring his trumpet on the trip, but he did bring his mouthpiece. He remembers the music from that trip, particularly the music in Sicily. Turns out that there are a lot of brass bands in Sicily and he would buzz along to the music using his mouthpiece. As much as he loved the trip, he could not wait to get back to his trumpet. The longing that he felt for it proved that he already was a musician.

Andrew credits the leader of the barbershop quartet initiative at school with instilling in him the tenacity to be the best he could be. Apparently he had an uncanny knack of accurately reading people and he said to Andrew that he could tell that that he was misunderstood, that his parents' divorce was affecting him negatively and that if didn't get serious and pick a direction he would fall into the easiest, most mundane career path instead of fulfilling his potential. From then on, almost out of fear, he began practicing the trumpet ceaselessly, probably eight or nine hours a day. He would wake up early and practice; he practiced at lunchtime; he practiced after school and late into the night. When it got too late he'd play into the closet to muffle the sound. All that practice paid off when he was accepted into every university he applied for. He chose to go to Humber College which has a fantastic music program particularly on the jazz side. He earned a diploma in performance and a degree in composition and recording production. Later he earned his Masters at the Berklee Global Jazz Institute in Boston under the guidance of Grammy® award winning Panamanian pianist-composer Danilo Pérez. It was Pérez who opened Andrew's mind to the idea that music is so much more than just music. It's





a vehicle for social cohesion and a way to express things that we cannot express with words. It is in uncertain times, like the times we are living in right now, when music is at its most powerful. It was with this thought in mind that Andrew first picked up his trumpet and went outside to salute the healthcare workers.

Being a musician is something that a person just is. It's hard to think of it as a career, and yet long gone are the days of the strolling minstrel. Music feeds the soul but it does not pay the rent. Andrew paid his dues playing weddings every weekend, but he did not even get paid for his first corporate gig, the opening of a local bank. This brings up a sore point for all artists who are not treated as professionals supplying a service. Exposure also does not pay the rent. A company would never bring in someone to fix their photocopier and "pay" them not with money but by telling everyone what a good job they did; nor should they expect musicians or any artist to provide their services for free.

Andrew has gone on to play at major national and international festivals including Newport Jazz Festival, Monterey Jazz Festival, Panama Jazz Festival, Kobe Jazz Walk, Toronto Jazz Festival and Montreal Jazz Festival, to name a few.

His first album, *Illustrations*, was created over a period of five years and represents a snapshot of his life from his early to mid 20s when he spent a good deal of time travelling throughout Japan. Released in 2016, the digital album is available at [Bandcamp.com](http://Bandcamp.com).

You will notice that jazz legend Wynton Marsalis is thanked in the liner notes on *Illustrations*. Marsalis played Massey Hall back in 2011 and Andrew waited in line after the show to meet him. He set himself apart from the other fans by transcribing all of Marsalis' trumpet solos on paper and presented them to him for his signature. It was a fairly large pile of paper filled with thousands of musical notes. Marsalis began to flip through the pages and paused on one page saying, "I'm pretty sure this is an F-sharp, not an F-natural." Andrew was then invited into the backstage dressing room to hang out with Marsalis and a few other lucky young musicians. During that magical night Marsalis was answering a question about how to tell the difference between someone who can play and someone who can't. He pointed at Andrew and said, "I've never heard him play, but I can just tell he can play." As they say, it was the beginning of a beautiful friendship. Marsalis gave Andrew his phone number which

he has used sparingly over the years. When he played at Jazz at Lincoln Centre in 2016 Marsalis stopped by for a listen which must have been the fulfillment of a dream for Andrew.

The beginning of 2020 saw the birth of The Andrew McAnsh Quartet. They came together two days before their first gig and immediately had their own sound. The quartet featuring Andrew on trumpet, Paul Morrison on piano, Jonathan Chapman on bass, and Norbert Botos on drums started playing gigs and recording in January. Because the world came to a stop due to Covid-19, Andrew has been sitting on the recording ever since but, as he's been doing so much solo playing during the lockdown, he'll probably add a few solo pieces. Hopefully the album will be ready for release later this year – so stay tuned!

Covid also interrupted a new position Andrew started in January as the brass instructor at Montcrest School in Scarborough. His mother had been a teacher and found such satisfaction in the role. Andrew feels a responsibility to pass the musical torch to the next generation of musicians. He says that there is nothing quite like being on the other end of an a-ha moment. Teaching has been something he's been able to continue to do remotely from home during the lockdown.

Home is an apartment across the street from High Park that he shares with his partner and fellow musician, vocalist Nastasia Y ([nastasiay.com](http://nastasiay.com)) and roommate flamenco guitarist Matt Sellick (part of Jesse Cook's touring band!). Andrew and Nastasia have been living in the High Park area for just under a year and have fallen in love with the neighbourhood. They love the small town feel, the welcoming community vibe, the unique shops combined with the benefit of being close to the subway and the ability to be downtown in minutes. Local favourites include Coffee & All That Jazz, Café Polonez, Rowe Farms, Outpost Coffee Roasters and Tibet Kitchen. Both Andrew and Nastasia performed at Hugh's Room before it closed as well as at Gate 403 and The Local.

Of course, they also love High Park and during the lockdown Andrew has taken to seeking out fallen logs in the woods where he can practice the trumpet. So if you hear the soothing sounds of jazz wafting faintly through the trees on your next walk through the park, you can be fairly sure that it's Andrew working on a trumpet solo, and that you are getting a special preview of a new piece that might just appear on his next album.

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