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PASSING THE TORCH:

AN INTERVIEW WITH ANDI BECKENDORF AND A TRIBUTE TO HER SERVICE TO THE ISB

By Jeremy C. Baguyos

Andi Beckendorf was appointed Associate Editor of *Bass World* in 2001 and worked alongside the celebrated Editor at that time, Joëlle Morton. In 2005, Andi was tapped to assume the post of Editor, and for the past five years the readership has benefited from her professionalism, her precise editing, her astute content management, and her steady and watchful pursuit of the highest possible standards and values of the ISB and its journal. This issue of *Bass World* will be the first without Andi Beckendorf at the helm, but we are not going to bid farewell. Instead, we are going to have the opportunity to know her a little better. For nine years she has reviewed and edited articles, narratives, and prose in order to prepare them for the ISB readership. The nature of the post of Editor allowed her to become acquainted with many bassists and their diverse interests. Yet, I feel, we know very little about her. For this reason, it is fitting to end her tenure with an interview.

JB: When did you first begin playing the bass, and what has been your double bass career path?

AB: I started playing the bass when I was nine years old. In my hometown, you could join the school orchestra after fourth grade, and I knew I wanted to play the bass. I took lessons from my orchestra directors until I went to college, but put in a lot of hard work on my own to be able to play things like Handel's *Messiah* and compete in the state solo and ensemble contest each year. My dad taught at the high school, so I would ride in with him before school so I could practice. My parents came to every one of my concerts, and I owe them a huge thank you for carting me (and the bass!) around to summer lessons and events until I had a car of my own. I have always been interested in teaching, and had my first bass student when I was a freshman in high school—every couple of weeks or so, I would go

over to the junior high after school to give a lesson to a seventh grader! In college, I started out as a physics major, which lasted for one semester—lab was cutting in to my orchestra rehearsal time, so I officially switched my major to music.

I consider myself lucky to have had the opportunity to work with Diana Gannett at the University of Iowa, where I did my MA and DMA in double bass performance and pedagogy. Diana was my first “real” bass teacher, and I had a lot of things to learn! We had a fantastic studio of players while I was there, and I learned so much from listening to and playing with my colleagues. Orchestral playing is my favorite, though I also enjoy chamber music very much—if I can just convince folks to do the repertoire that includes double bass! Teaching has remained a very important part of my musical life, and even though I have a day job as a college librarian, I have a small studio, and am very proud of my students who have participated in the Iowa All-State Orchestra the past two years. I have played in several regional symphony orchestras over the last twenty years, and am currently Assistant Principal in the Rochester (MN) Symphony Orchestra.

JB: When did you first get involved with the ISB?

AB: I first heard about the ISB when I was a college student, and I think I still have my first membership card. Every dorm room I lived in had ISB posters hanging on the wall, and I dreamed of one day attending a convention. Little did I know that when I chose the University of Iowa for graduate school, we would host the conven-



Andi Beckendorf, left, at the 2005 ISB convention with ISB general manager Madeleine Crouch and Rufus Reid.

tion at our School of Music. I consider myself very lucky to have been a member of the ISB Board as Diana Gannett's planning assistant for the 1999 “Heart of the Bass” convention. It was through this work that I first met the phenomenal Madeleine Crouch, the embodiment of the heart of the bass. Another person I met during the 1999 convention was Joëlle Morton, the Editor of *Bass World* at the time, who had done the type of scholarship I aspired to. After working with Joëlle, Madeleine, and the rest of the folks who made that such a fantastic experience, I set the goal of someday making a contribution to *Bass World*. To my surprise, I was soon invited to join the editorial staff as Associate Editor, managing the sheet music and recording reviews.

JB: Do you consider yourself a “word geek”? Tell us about your secret double life as a haiku enthusiast!

AB: Am I a word geek? Absolutely! (Is there a t-shirt for that?) I love all kinds of words, and love to use them and play with them in different ways. I always try to use the right word in the right place, and for *Bass World*, this means making language as clear as possible for our worldwide readers.

I love to read all kinds of things, both fiction and non-fiction, and always pay attention to the unique use of language as part of the writer's voice—in fact, the way I would describe a “writer's voice” would be like trying to distinguish a Brahms melody from one of Mozart—the way the elements of music are put together results in a distinctive “voice.” I used to write limericks, but I guess in this age of sound bites and Twitter, things are getting smaller, so I now do haiku. Occasionally, ISB General Manager Madeleine Crouch and I exchange haiku as part of our business correspondence related to the magazine. Our verses are written quickly, on the fly, almost in a “chat” format, and on any topic, though mine are often related to the weather. I believe traditional haiku are related to the seasons, but typically do not directly name the subject of the verse. Here's a quick one, related to the bass (time to write: less than 30 seconds):

Pull sounds low and deep,
Metal, wood come together:
Spark set to music.

JB: What has being the editor of *Bass World* meant to you these past five years? Any words of wisdom to pass along to your readers who might have an idea for an article?

AB: I was honored to be chosen as *Bass World* editor, especially given the outstanding work that Joëlle had done, and having seen the immense amount of respect the Board and ISB members had for her work. It has been an incredible experience to meet so many fantastic people from around the world, and to see them share “bass love” with everyone who attends the conventions. The ISB Portrait Calendar is something that I have worked to make more representative

of our worldwide membership, not only by including profiles of artists from around the world, but by including multicultural holidays that may be celebrated by ISB members. E-mail and online communication have made it easier to be in contact, and it has been a privilege for me to work with such a diverse selection of artists and bring their stories and profiles to our members. I have viewed the calendar as a way to celebrate both the current “greats” of the bass world and the historical figures to whom we owe so much.

The words of wisdom I have are: Share your stories and ideas with each other and through the tools available to the worldwide bass community. With so many channels available for communication, ideas can sometimes get lost or not find quite the right audience the first time around. I often wonder what would happen if we could somehow measure all of the creativity and brainstorming that happens at ISB Conventions—could bass players really take over the world? If we continue to offer ideas, listen to each other, and creatively explore, I have no doubt that bassists will accomplish much in the way of performance and scholarship.

JB: What areas in double bass scholarship/research do you think bass players need to write about?

AB: I think the possibilities in this area are limitless. One trend that I have noticed lately is that there are more “conversation” articles—which could be interviews with artists who have done something unique as part of their career, or maybe a group of folks who would approach something from different viewpoints. Readers benefit from these types of articles in a couple of ways: first, we get to hear directly from artists or experts on a variety of topics, and second, we get to experience an interchange between people who are interested in what someone else has to say. There are so many bass stories out there, from small, community-oriented stories (I bet many of us never thought to ask our teachers about their bass playing path), to big-picture, global stories (how a certain artist got to where she/he is today and what influenced that path). Learning from these stories is based on listening, and I don't think there was the same sort of awareness about collecting these stories back in the days of Dragonetti and Bottesini. We are all personally connected to this great instrument in some way, and I

think it would be wonderful if we could capture our stories in ways that have never been possible before.

JB: What are some of your future projects?

AB: Someday, I would like to do further exploration on the topic I spoke about at the Penn State Convention, the traveling double bass virtuosi in the 18th century. There is more source work to be done on this topic, and I find it fascinating to wonder whether these artists ever crossed paths with each other, how much finagling went on to try to obtain certain positions as a court musician, or what it was really like to travel with a double bass using the transportation of the time. My doctoral essay was about Johann Spenger, and I would love to travel to Germany to see where he lived and worked as a court musician (which also happens to be an area where my German ancestors came from). I'm sure many of us dream about solving some of the mysteries of the bass world—wouldn't it be great to finally discover the lost Haydn bass concerto? Playing for fun has been something that has taken a back burner for a while, and I'd like to get back into some solo repertoire and orchestral excerpts. This will be a great time to try out some of the things I have heard and read over the past few years, as part of my ISB experience.

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