



Josh Rzepka is an anomaly. A baby-faced twentysomething who prefers concert halls over beer halls. A budding virtuoso whose instrument of choice is a trumpet, not an electric guitar. A passionate Clevelander who is quick to praise his Northeast Ohio peers. A tireless musician who is plugging the proverbial "brain drain" one triumphant note at a time, without tooting his own horn. His playing is inspired, and his ethos is inspiring. In less than a year, he conceived, recorded and released two albums: a beguiling, well-received collection of jazz originals entitled *Midwest Coast* and *Josh Rzepka: Music for Baroque Trumpet*. The

latter is a splendidly anachronistic release, as Rzepka takes the solo reins with backing from a chamber orchestra on works by Torelli, Purcell, Handel, Telemann and Vivaldi. OhioAuthority caught up with [Rzepka](#) on the day of *Baroque's* release to learn what inspires him in and outside of Northeast Ohio.

OA: When did you begin playing the trumpet and what attracted you to it?

JR: I began playing the trumpet in the fourth grade, when I was nine years old. They brought all of the instruments into my school, and I was able to make some noise on it, so I took it home and started to practice on it.

OA: You've described there only being two kinds of music: good and bad. What's good? What's bad?

JR: It is very subjective from person to person, but I think requisites are that the music and musician are honest and that the intent to be musical and connect with fellow musician and audience are there... that the music is really coming from the person - what they are hearing inside them (same goes with composers) – not that they are playing something that they think people want to hear, and not that they are trying to make something which has motives other than being musical. I like music in many different genres: jazz, classical, blues, Latin, rock and funk, R&B, and within each genre you have music that is good and bad. I don't want to start naming too many names, but I love Mahler, Beethoven, Clifford Brown, Miles [Davis], Ray Charles, Maurice Andre, Oscar Peterson, Eric Clapton, Poncho Sanchez, Louis Armstrong, [Duke] Ellington... I could go on for a very long time. As far as bad music, I am not sure I want to name names. Put it this way: you can have great musicians play "bad" music, and it will still be bad. On the flip side, you can have not-so great musicians play good music, and it is still good music - perhaps not the best performance - but good nonetheless. It is very tough to quantify, but I think that people's ears can tell the difference pretty quickly. There is something in the music. That's what makes it so amazing.

OA: □ You've gone on the record to say that you're lucky to be playing and recording in Northeast Ohio. Who or what in this region makes you feel fortunate to be here?

JR: Northeast Ohio has a wealth of amazing musicians, across genres. I really think the crown jewel is the Cleveland Orchestra, absolutely one of the best in the world. The Cleveland Jazz Orchestra is great, and we have many amazing jazz musicians in the scene as well. Additionally, all of the musicians in Northeast Ohio are very friendly, and they want to meet new people, and they want to work with you. Perhaps it's a Midwest thing where people are just a little more laid back and easy to get along with. Northeast Ohio has some of the best musicians in the world, and they mostly don't get too much credit for it. Institutions like Oberlin – I graduated in 2006 – and CIM have some of the best classical and jazz musicians in the world on faculty, and they all chose to be here for one reason or another. They all add to the scene, whether they live here full-time or part-time. The fact that they are accessible, and that you can hear them play and work with them is really tremendous.

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OA: Releasing a solo album of jazz originals was an ambitious project. How did the idea to release two albums – one jazz, one classical – in one year arise and why did you think it was possible?

JR: I thought it was possible mainly because nobody told me that it was not, and I really had no idea what I was getting myself into, so I couldn't convince myself otherwise. I was aware that Wynton Marsalis recorded and released CDs in both genres the same year on a number of occasions, so I knew it could be done. Although, it would have been easier with a major label on my side organizing and paying for everything. The original goal was to record both CDs, and I was very intent to accomplish that goal, the whole one-year thing came out of me just deciding that I needed to start putting myself out there, and that I better hurry up and work as hard and as quick as I could if I wanted to really make a career out of music.

OA: How did you decide what pieces would be featured on *Baroque Music for Trumpet*?

JR: It was all music that I loved to play, and loved to listen to; a lot of music I grew up with and have studied. Additionally, my budget had a fair amount to do with what I could choose. All of the music needed to be able to be recorded within a certain number of hours of rehearsals and recording time. Recording with this many musicians is very expensive, so I had to be careful to choose music that could be quickly rehearsed and music that could be recorded in a reasonable amount of time. Also, all of the pieces use basically the same number of musicians and do not have any percussion, woodwinds or other brass.

OA: What was it like recording with a chamber orchestra, and how did you assemble the group of musicians?

JR: Recording with a chamber orchestra was really a treat for me. I have not had that many opportunities to play as a soloist with a chamber orchestra, and it is amazing to be able to play a solo with that many people backing you up. It is really fantastic how the entire ensemble communicates and reacts with your playing, and allows you to interact and communicate with it.

OA: What type of audience do you hope to attract with *Baroque Music*?

JR: I certainly hope that many of my jazz fans who might not be too big into classical music might give it a listen, and I hope that I can attract an audience of people who are big into classical music. I really hope to get my music out there as much as possible, and hope that people will realize that

even though a piece of music might be over 300 years old, it does not mean that it is no longer worth playing, or that it has lost its relevance.

OA: Was it more rewarding recording an album of originals as on *Midwest Coast*, or paying homage to the baroque masters?

JR: Wow – kind of like asking, "Who is your favorite sibling?" I think they were both great challenges for me, and I think they both were rewarding for many reasons. For *Midwest Coast*, it was very rewarding to see my own compositions come to life, and to see that if I really focused on composing, I could come up with some good tunes. It gave me a lot of confidence in what I can accomplish if I set my mind to it. Recording the baroque music was a lot of fun and really quite rewarding. I spent months practicing, organizing, emailing and getting this project together. It was *way* more work than *Midwest Coast*, with over 30 people being involved in the recording and over a year in the making, so I think I feel a greater sense of accomplishment just due to the immense scope of the project.

OA: With two albums under your belt and an extensive history of live performances, which do you prefer: recording or performing?

JR: I really like them both, but for different reasons. I would say I get much more enjoyment from playing live, it is much more fun and exciting. There is a greater connection for me when I can play for people; it is very communicative and rewarding. It is never the same, and some very exciting things happen on a nightly basis. As far as recording, it is a great challenge and is very rewarding to work toward a project, and create a "snapshot" of your playing at that very moment. I like challenges and working toward goals, and to create something like a recording is a very special thing: That I can say, "This is a CD of my music; this is 'me'." When you perform live, it is gone after you play it, there is nothing to chronicle and remember the performance by. By recording, I feel as though I have contributed something that is bigger than me, in that it can go anywhere and can be heard forever - just like a painting can be saved and looked at, my music is now out there and cannot be taken back.

Trumpet Concerto in D - "Estienne Roger" (Torelli); I. Allegro (from *Josh Rzepka: Baroque Music for Trumpet*)

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