

## Tim Price – “Playing and communicating. That’s my thing!”

*Tim Price, a graduate of the Berklee College in Boston, America’s most famous jazz school, is a multi-woodwind instrumentalist. He plays all the saxophones, clarinet, flute, and is one of the few jazz bassoonists on the scene. In addition to his work as a Selmer clinician, he puts on workshops worldwide and has published two saxophone books through Hal Leonard, one on rock-and-roll saxophone and a collection of solos by the alto saxophonist Cannonball Adderley. Tim Price lives in Philadelphia but teaches also in New York City. The list of famous musicians that Tim Price has shared the bandstand with is long – Bennie Green, Hans Dulfer, Charlie Mariano, Ernie Watts, just to mention a few. For more than 18 years Tim Price has been a writer for the well known “Saxophone Journal” and publisher of a workshop series on jazz improvisation and saxophone technique.*

sonic: On your web site you present yourself as a jazz saxophonist, electric bassoonist, multi-woodwind instrumentalist, Selmer clinician, jazz teacher, and author. Is there a priority in this list?

T. Price: The most important of all these activities is to be the best musician that I can be. Everything else is secondary. I practice every day, I write, I work on various musical things, and I listen to a lot of music. Without dedication and discipline, whatever I do – whether it is as a musician, bassoonist or jazz saxophonist or even as a teacher – would be worth nothing. What drives me is my dedication to music. I’ve never had a choice in my life since I began to play music in junior high school. Since that time, there has never been another path for me.

sonic: How did you get your start in music?

T. Price: When I was a boy, I wanted to play the saxophone. The music program in school was pretty good, but because it was very overcrowded, I couldn’t get in at first. So my mother bought me a saxophone. One or two weeks later a friend of my mother, who was a jazz fan, gave me a Gerry Mulligan record to listen to. On TV I saw John Handy play alto sax and saxello, and I went out right away and bought the recording. Then I started to read Downbeat magazine and

got into different musical styles. I liked listening to the music of (hardbop trumpeter) Lee Morgan.

sonic: No one in the family played music?

T. Price: No, not at all. My aunt had records of Artie Shaw (swing clarinetist) – that’s where my respect for Artie Shaw came from. But I also learned to tell the difference between good and bad music. At the same time I was listening to Artie Shaw, I was getting into Charles Lloyd. That wasn’t a contradiction for me as a young person. I just wanted to listen to the music and didn’t have to judge it.

sonic: What instrument is the most important for you? This may be a stupid question, but what would happen if the Bush administration passed a law that only allowed one instrument per person? Which would it be?

T. Price: (laughs) I didn’t vote for Bush. Right now I can best express myself with the tenor sax. It gives me the most personal sound. But different listeners discover different things in my playing. Some people especially like my flute playing. Others say: “The way you play the bassoon, why do you want to play the saxophone?” But without the saxophone, I could never play the other instruments the way I do. My musical insights come from playing the saxophone. I see musical ideas through the saxophone like through a telescope.

sonic: Tell us something about your nagaswaram.

T. Price: The nagaswaram is an Indian double reed instrument. My own was Charlie Mariano’s back-up, and he sold it to me on my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

sonic: He mentioned the nagaswaram in an interview (sonic June 2003) and said that he wouldn’t play the instrument any more, because it is too difficult to play.

T. Price: It is a difficult instrument. It is pitched in F#, requires a lot of breath support, and has a double reed made from one piece of cane. There are some aspects of that instrument that I can use in my bassoon playing. Since both are double reed instruments, there were certain

things from playing the nagaswaram that I could adapt to the bassoon, for example playing with the tone holes half covered. For the most part, the sound of the nagaswaram is produced through breath support and embouchure. It's basically just an ebony tube with holes! Charlie is right; it is a physically very difficult instrument to play.

sonic: Were you already playing the nagaswaram when you started to play the bassoon?

T. Price: Actually, I was already playing the bassoon in high school. My high school teacher wasn't very enthusiastic about my saxophone playing. There were already too many saxophone players in the school, and since I could also play clarinet and flute, he thought I could play the bassoon as well. He knew I was going to Berklee to study jazz, but he wanted to "save" me for classical music. So I got a bassoon, and my teacher thought: "Let's see what he does with it." But he had no idea that at this point the bassoon was perfect, because I was listening to Illinois Jacquet (tenor saxophonist and jazz bassoonist) and Yusef Lateef (flute, tenor saxophone, oboe).

sonic: Do you get more gigs through the bassoon? It's not exactly a typical doubling instrument for a jazz saxophonist.

T. Price: No. A lot of people don't have any idea what the bassoon even sounds like. It sometimes happens that the leader turns around and stares at me when I start to play. And when I start to alter the sound with a whammy or wah-wah pedal... Some people love it and others... but that's the way it goes.

sonic: Do you use all of these electronic effects on the saxophone as well?

T. Price: No. Funny actually. If I were to play in a really electronic setting, I would eventually think about it. I'm crazy about these POD pedals from Line6. They give you a really wide range of different sounds. Of course, I mix the effect sounds with the unaltered sound of the bassoon, so that the combination is not totally synthetic. You can always hear that I'm generating the sound. Jane Ira Bloom (page 62) did something similar in the 1970's with the soprano saxophone. You could

always hear that it was a saxophone. It was just an additional tone color, like a mute. Do you know what I mean?

sonic: Yes, like extra layers.

T. Price: Yes! You have to listen to where it comes from. Nothing sounds better than a bassoon with a wah-wah. I've been using these effects for about 20 years on the bassoon. It comes from listening to people like Clark Terry or Bob Brookmeyer, the way they used the plunger. I mean, what we have here is a wah-wah effect. And as you know, one of my heaviest influences was Charlie Mariano, whom I studied with. He was a catalyst for my thinking, a giant inspiration! Primarily, of course, because I imitated him. He also used a wah-wah pedal in the 1970's, when he was playing with Jasper Van't Hoft and Pork Pie and some of these bands, but you could always tell that it was a sax. When I play the bassoon in an acoustic setting, I always use a little combo amplifier to "get the sound off the floor", like a monitor.

sonic: How do you capture the sound? Microphone or pick-up?

T. Price: I have experimented for years. For a long time I used a Barcus Berry pick-up, but that was always kind of a gamble, because sometimes the cable didn't work. The quality wasn't very good back then. But for that time, it was an acceptable solution. Then for a while I experimented with a double microphone system, but a lot of that stuff tended to get lost during the normal course of setting up and taking down. Not long ago I found a guy in California who built a pick-up directly into the bocal. It sounds fantastic. I can play normally, and you also don't need to drill holes, and so forth.

sonic: I think I heard you played the bassoon in the Mingus Big Band?

T. Price: Not in the big band, but in the Mingus Orchestra. There and in the Butch Morris Orchestra. But these gigs are very rare. With Mingus, I was just a sub. At the moment I play the bassoon the most with my good buddy Rachel Z (pianist and singer).

sonic: What kind of music do you two make together? She doesn't seem to be fixed on one style.

T. Price: Yes, she is very versatile. With her, anything can happen. She is one of my favorite people to make music with. Our communication is at a level where talking isn't needed anymore. I can give her a piece I wrote, even if it's just an 18 bar form, and it's enough to say "Hey Rachel, it should have a feel like this." And she'll always say: "OK. Cool." In the mean time I just say: "Hey Rachel, maybe you want to play an intro." And we play it at a gig without rehearsing it, and people just flip out. Of course, we have a regular repertoire, like an Afro-Cuban arrangement of the Beatles song "I Feel Fine" that I completely reharmonized, some originals by me, or pieces from her CD "Room Of One's Own", where I play bassoon or flute. Then we have a big repertoire of Wayne Shorter tunes that are seldom played like "Tom Thumb". When we play together, we have a lot of improvised intros and interludes. Even when we play standards, there is always something fresh and new, just because of the way we approach it. I am really blessed that I have her not only as a musical partner but also as a friend. It's great to have the possibility to bring in well-known musicians to my gigs, like Lew Tabackin. When I played at the North Sea Jazz Festival, I had the great luck to have Ray Drummond on bass and Benny Green on piano to play with me.

sonic: You have just brought out a new CD "Passion Sax".

T. Price: Yes, I produced it myself in cooperation with a couple of people from the Philadelphia area. With this CD, I wanted to document a special aspect of my playing. Stylistically, this CD can be classified as classic or mainstream jazz. I play exclusively tenor and clarinet. By bringing such CDs out, I naturally want to bring attention to myself as a musician. Also, it's the kind of thing that people can take home from clinics and workshops. Of course, I'd like to find someone to publish my recordings, and I'd like to record more. But the most important thing for me is just to play, to communicate, and to document all aspects of my playing. In the near future a CD will be ready featuring only free improvised duets with the saxophonist Sue Terry. Playing and communicating. That's my thing. It doesn't matter if it's an Indian Raga or a piece by Rachel Z or Charlie Parker, or even a free improvisation with another musician. In my opinion, that's what people want – your creative energy.

sonic: How can someone buy your publications

and CDs?

T. Price: Through my web site, or simply with an email to [timpricejazz@aol.com](mailto:timpricejazz@aol.com).

sonic: You are a very active teacher. Probably most people who are looking for instructional material on the internet know you in this connection. That appears to be more fun than a necessity to earn a living.

T. Price: Absolutely correct. As a young man, I had the great luck at Berklee to be exposed to the influence of people like Joe Viola, Charlie Mariano and Andy McGhee. These people were not only cutting edge players, but also cutting edge teachers. So I recognized as a 17 year old that teaching is an important part of being a musician, and not only from an economic point of view. I love teaching. It's a part of me.

sonic: What do you teach primarily? Saxophone? Bassoon?

T. Price: Well, a lot of saxophone mixed with jazz improvisation. Jazz tradition, or in other words: I get a student who wants to sound like one of the current popular saxophonists, and I sit down and broaden his or her horizons with people like Lester Young, Coleman Hawkins, and Don Byas.

sonic: So more jazz instruction than instrumental instruction?

T. Price: Well, I also do a lot of instrumental instruction at home in Pennsylvania. I give the kids the basics, whether on clarinet or bassoon. And that's good, because, when you don't keep your eye on the basics as a teacher, then you get a pro someday who maybe has a problem with embouchure or fingering, and you don't know how to handle it. It's never boring. (laughs)

sonic: How do you start, when you want to teach a beginner improvisation?

T. Price: We begin with them imitating me a little. I give them a note or two and get them to the point where they can play them. Let's say they should answer with a motif. Then I put on an Aebersold play-along – one with only one or two chords. I play a lick without writing it down,

but I tell them the notes, and they have to play it. When that is going OK, I say: "Just go with it. Change the rhythm, but keep the notes." That's the ticket – call and response.

sonic: I've heard that you offer lessons on line?

T. Price: Not online lessons, it works by sending cassettes. It's just that the communication has gone through the web in recent years. The idea came about from the fact that I still study with Charlie Banacos, who lives near Boston. I am proud to have been a student of his for decades together with people like Mike Stern and Gary Dial. When I was writing for the Saxophone Journal, people started calling me and asking for help. So I got the idea to teach by mail. Suddenly I had students in Hawaii and Australia. It's funny how alike we are – this thirst for knowledge.

sonic: What do you study with Banacos?

T. Price: At the moment, I'm working a lot on voicings, because I play a little piano, and especially on advanced lines. Everyone is always looking for possibilities to learn. Let me quote Coltrane: "There is never an end to music, there is always some new sound to imagine." That's one of my credos!

sonic: You give clinics at universities. What does such an event look like?

T. Price: Well, every university is different. The groups are different, so my way of approaching them differs. Recently, for example, I was at the Loyola campus in New Orleans with Tony Dragadi's class – himself a great saxophonist who has played with Carla Bley and others. First we play together, for example a blues or a standard. We discuss it, what they do and what they should do, really approach the playing analytically. And naturally, we also talk about higher concepts like our jazz heritage. It was Coltrane's birthday, so I talk about the fact that Coltrane didn't come on the scene as a 24-year-old superstar with a huge record deal in his back pocket. He played for years first as a rhythm and blues saxophonist with people like Eddie Cleanhead Vinson. That's how he got a solid basis in traditional music. Then I get around to the fact that you can't play tunes like "Giant Steps" or "Moments Notice" correctly, if you don't understand "Have You Met Miss Jones". In the same sense, I emphasize the fact that it's not enough

to play the blues one way. In other words, it makes a difference whether you play the blues fast or medium, with a bridge or with a Latin feel. Such a workshop often inspires the kids for a long time. It can be a real support for the teacher of this group. One time I put on a workshop at a small college near Minneapolis with the theme "Oliver Nelson". They practiced things I gave them a couple of months ahead of time. Then I went up there and did clinics and trials with them. And you would be surprised: Regardless of where you go, even an out of the way place near Minneapolis, there's always a kid who asks about Don Byas or Charlie Mariano. We're all alike in that way. If only the rest of the world could understand that, this common love for music, then we could finally stop fighting at every opportunity!

sonic: Tech talk! Tell us about your equipment.

T. Price: I'm a Selmer clinician, endorse Selmer and play their instruments. I play a silver plated Serie III tenor with a Paraschos wooden neck. I use a Lamberson mouthpiece made from Delrin (high-end white plastic). My reeds are either Ishimori or Francois Louis. Both use the same cane, but the cut is different. Which one works better is dependent on the musical context. In an acoustic situation probably the somewhat harder Francois Louis, with Rachel or a big band the Ishimori probably fits better. In other words, reeds are just tools. And today we as saxophonists are really well off, because there are a lot of really good reeds out there. Oh! You'll like this: I use a custom made Dejacques neck strap. Two straps in one, so I can change between saxophone and bassoon more easily. On my Stritch, my straight Keilwerth alto, I play a Francois Louis plexiglass mouthpiece with 3.5 reeds. It has a completely different sound than a normal alto. It sounds more like a hybrid between an alto and a tenor. On my web site under "Audio" there are three live sound clips "Live Hot Stritch" where you can listen to the sound. I like the sound. I was always a fan of Roland Kirk.

sonic: There's also a straight tenor. I think Joe Lovano has one.

T. Price: Yes. I do too. But, from a practical point of view, you can only use it at home. In a gig bag it looks like a bazooka, and I'm definitely not walking through an airport with one! Lovano recorded an album for the Japanese Blue Note label with one, and I think it's one of his best

recordings. I play a soprano saxophone made by Borgani. I have a straight and a curved. They sound completely different, so I use both. I was always a fan of Jan Garbarek and his sound on the curved soprano, and that was one of Borgani's first from the old days. Borgani has completely redone its range and made a really top-notch instrument. And the cool thing is that it's not a Selmer copy. I use a Lamberson mouthpiece here also. I play a flute from Haynes with a headpiece by Paraschos, so it's wooden. My Bb and bass clarinets are both Selmer. The Bb is a Signature model that I endorse. An unbelievable instrument, and I say that not only because I endorse it. It can do everything.

sonic: How do you practice, when you play so many different instruments?

T. Price: That's simple. For all instruments you need good breath support, so you have to understand the importance of practicing long tones. I use different twelve-tone series for practicing long tones. There are examples on my web site. Besides that, I make sure that I play all new material very slowly to start with. Of course, my activities as a teacher help me maintain my clarinet and flute chops. At the end of a day filled with lessons, I always take a little time to come down and play a ballad just for myself. Kind of like a cocktail after a long day to get all the etudes and exercises out of my head.

sonic: So warming down as the counterpart of warming up. I never heard of that.

T. Price: Yes, you could call it that. Teaching is hard work.

sonic: Do you have special plans for the future, perhaps a particular goal?

T. Price: I would like to expand my activities more toward Europe. I really like the recognition there. I like many of the musicians that I have met there, I like the culture, and I love to travel.

sonic: What does your wife say to all this travel?

T. Price: I try to be cooperative and to plan well. My wife is totally behind me and my profession. For example, Ernie Watts used to come by often to practice, when he was visiting his father who lived in the area. One time we were working on different fingerings for altissimo and multiphonics until late in the night, and suddenly he yells: "Oh my god, it's midnight! Your wife is going to shoot us!" But she was already asleep. She's OK with it. Such situations don't happen often. I'm really lucky.

In the next issue: Jazz Saxophone Workshop by Tim Price.

Website: [www.timpricejazz.com](http://www.timpricejazz.com)