

# Bruce Abbott's Life In Music

by Alan Pollock

BREWSTER – There may have been a slight change in tempo and some chord shifts, but Bruce Abbott's musical life is still bringing him joy and satisfaction. A well regarded saxophonist and flautist and longtime music teacher, Abbott is now taking time to focus on other passions: composing and music publishing.

By far the youngest of four brothers growing up in Pawtucket, R.I., Abbott came upon the saxophone on a whim when he was in the fourth grade. Walking home from school with his best friend, Dennis, he playfully swiped a piece of paper from his buddy's pocket, only to find out when he got home that it was a permission slip for music lessons. He called his friend to give it back "and he said, 'You know, I don't think I really wanted that. I just raised my hand and took it,'" Abbott recalled. So he left it on the kitchen table and his mother asked him about it.

"She said, 'Well, we have a saxophone, do you want to take lessons?' And I thought, well, why not? You know, I was 10 years old, sure I'll do it." He quickly found he loved something that most of his peers groused about: practicing his instrument. Before long, he was a proficient player. His first big break was two years later, when he was thumbing through the newspaper looking for an after-school job and found a want-ad for a saxophonist for a teen dance band.

"I remember showing it to my mother



Bruce Abbott at his home in Brewster.

ALAN POLLOCK PHOTO

and she said, why don't you call and see? I said, 'But I'm only 12 and they said "teen" dance band.'" With his 13th birthday a month away, Abbott called and got an audition. Gathered in one of the band member's basement, with milk and cookies available for snacks, Abbott tried out in front of the group of 16-year-olds who had been playing at high school dances. They wanted to begin playing at weddings and were struggling with a song, "The Shadow of Your Smile." It was outside their usual rock repertoire and didn't sound right. But Abbott knew the tune, and quickly pointed

out that the band had the sheet music out of order.

"So I think that impressed them," he said with a chuckle. They became the Glennwoods, and they performed together for many years, and they're still in touch with one another.

By the time Abbott was in high school, he was giving music lessons as a side gig, a prelude to his eventual professional career. He studied music education at Berklee College of Music but decided to take a gap year, and ended up studying at U.R.I., where he could focus more on his teaching skills; he ended up getting a degree in elementary education, figuring he would take a job as a regular elementary teacher. But the music kept calling.

The university was starting a new program in jazz studies, and the professor needed an assistant. Abbott found that he enjoyed teaching musicians and leading ensembles, and the position led him to help create the new instrumental music program at nearby Salve Regina University. At the time, he had already met Lisa, the woman who would become his wife; she was a school psychologist at Nauset High School, and the two spent a lot of time commuting to be together. When a music teacher position opened at Nauset, Abbott made the leap.

"I knew Nauset through Lisa, and I also wanted to become more a part of this community," he said. He taught there for years, and regularly runs into his former

students. "I'll be in the supermarket, and as soon as you hear, 'Mr. Abbott?' you think, OK, am I going to remember who this is?" he said with a laugh.

As a teacher, Abbott felt the pull to perform more often, and after a decade at Nauset, he decided to split his time performing and giving private lessons at his home in Brewster. He has former students far and wide, at least one of whom also became a music teacher.

Along the way, he had performed in a variety of bands, even landing gigs to play with visiting big-name acts that came through Providence, including Diana Ross and Aretha Franklin. His musical connections led Abbott to a Rhode Island recording company, and with friends visited and recorded some songs on a lark. "The president of the company walked by and said, 'What is that?'" He heard the music and decided to release some of the songs, eventually commissioning them to play easy listening jazz. It was the kind of jazz one could listen to at dinner and not get indigestion, Abbott quipped.

"No Roloids required," he said. "So we ended up doing maybe a dozen album projects with them, which was a great experience. We were involved in producing it, writing the arrangements." The group became the North Star Jazz Ensemble.

Abbott still likes to record, but now does it in a studio in his home — when the urge

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strikes him, and without the pressure of having to pay an engineer.

“So I can take my time with it now,” he said. His website, BruceAbbottMusic.com, has links to around 10 albums he's recorded, with a number of original compositions in jazz, pop songs, American standards and even classical pieces. His music can be found on most popular streaming services. He's also publishing music online, and loves to see when his songs and arrangements have been purchased by musicians all over the world.

Abbott's inspiration comes from the world around him. A few years ago, he and Lisa made a trip to South America and met a Peruvian ceramicist. The artist had begun creating a piece of pottery but said he didn't know what it would end up being until he finished it. “It's kind of like that with composing,” he said. He keeps snippets in a notebook, then refers to them when he feels like writing music, sometimes finding the germ of a song. “Here's a little idea, and then, let's see where it goes.”

Every day, Abbot finds music interesting and sustaining.

“It's just been a wonderful way to spend a lifetime,” he said.