

Bruce Abbott

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In the development of young artists, nature and nurture both play important roles. Jazz saxophonist Bruce Abbott was blessed with raw talent, but he also grew up in a home and a city that fostered his creative growth. In the summer of 1965, when Bruce was 10, the city of Pawtucket, Rhode Island offered free music lessons to the population's youth. "One of my older brothers played the saxophone," Abbott says. "When he went to college, he left his saxophone under his bed." With his mother's encouragement, Abbott dusted off his brother's sax and took advantage of Pawtucket's free lessons. "It flowed for me right away," Abbott recalls. His mother noticed the alacrity with which her son learned the instrument and signed him up for private lessons. Abbott studied with Art Pelosi, a high school teacher who also played in local jazz ensembles. "He was someone I really looked up to and learned a lot from, both in lessons and listening to him perform," Abbott explains. The musician also credits Pelosi for expanding his musical horizons. "He introduced me to some John Coltrane recordings," Abbott says. "That really opened up my ears."

Abbott joined his first band when he was 13 and developed a deep appreciation for the unique elements of jazz. He relishes the challenge of improvising, which he describes as a form of personal expression, and thrives on the genre's conversational tone. "Not that other music styles don't do this, but with jazz, it seems like it's at a more personal level because you interject your own creativity into it," Abbott says. "When I'm playing with a group of musicians, we're listening to each other and what I do is in response to what the other musicians are doing."

After three semesters at the Berklee College of Music in Boston, Abbott withdrew because he questioned whether a life in music was viable. "Like any relationship, you say, 'this is it,' and then you begin to wonder, 'is this really it?' So you back away and maybe try something a little different before realizing, 'no, that was it,' and you come back to it," he says.

The musician's words are backed up by experience. After Berklee, Abbott received a Bachelor's Degree in elementary education from the University of Rhode Island. Before he could dive into teaching, however, a professor encouraged him to apply for entry in a new graduate program in jazz studies. Abbott could not resist, nor did he want to.

Following the graduate program, Abbott taught at Salve Regina University for five years before accepting a job at Nauset High School in Eastham, where his wife worked. "We both just fell in love with the Cape," Abbott says. "We had the opportunity to stay, so we did." Abbott taught at Nauset for ten years, playing gigs whenever he could fit them into his busy schedule. "After 15 years as a full-time teacher, I realized I wanted more of a balance between performing and teaching," he notes.

Today, Abbott gives private lessons at his home studio three days a week and dedicates the rest of his time to performing. He frequently plays with jazz guitarist Fred Fried, entertaining patrons at restaurants across Cape Cod. They are a well-paired duo whose repertoire includes everything from classic Sinatra to inventive Beatles' covers. Abbott is also a member of the Cape Cod Jazz Quintet, which will perform at the Provincetown Jazz Festival this August.