

Quincy Could Have Been My Dad

When I was sixteen I received a call from a pianist named Charles Mims, Jr. I have no idea how he had heard of me. He let me know about an audition for a five-week U.S. tour with the Quincy Jones band, which included backing up the pop/soul group The Brothers Johnson.

I had just gotten my drivers license so was able to make the hour-plus ride in my Toyota Corolla from the San Fernando Valley out to someone's basement in Watts. I think it was my second time driving on the freeway.

I parked the car a few doors down from the house and walked the short distance on a sidewalk where weeds aggressively grew through cracks in the cement. I am sure I was a standout in the neighborhood, a "Valley Dude" with shoulder length blond hair. The only thing I could have done to stick out any more was carry a surf board.

The audition was pretty much just reading through charts, some switching around on parts, and occasionally sitting out while others were being listened to.

The next day I got the call: "You got the gig, man. Lead alto." My heart raced. I was going to tour with Q! My parents were thrilled, but I think also a little concerned. To be honest I don't think Quincy's people knew how young I was. But why should that matter? I played the music. Took care of business.

The rehearsals took place at A&M studios in Hollywood and were led by the great saxophonist Jerome Richardson. Jerome and my father worked together in the studios and when they ran into each other during one of these days my Dad asked Jerome how I was doing. "He asks too many questions." Later, when I saw Dad, he told me "Just make decisions and play. If they don't like your choices they'll let you know." He was right. So for the rest of the two weeks I played and tried to keep my mouth shut.

On a break during one of our last rehearsals Q's peeps came around with forms on clipboards, requesting our vitals: social security number, date of birth, etc. I filled them out and handed them back. We continued rehearsing. At the end of the session one of the attorneys called me into an office down some long hallway with gold records adorning carpeted walls. "Sit down." I did.

"According to this you are sixteen." "That's right," I responded, foolishly proud.

"You're under age. We're a corporation. The only way we can employ you is if we also hire a tutor/guardian. The fee for that person will be twice what we're paying you."

The attorney presented this fact to Quincy. The tour was to begin in a handful of days. They told Quincy it didn't make any sense to keep me. Quincy came up with a solution: he would adopt me! It would be temporary of course, but make it legally okay for me to come out and not have to lose money.

The attorneys convinced Quincy that it was too much trouble, too much paperwork. It would be easier to just replace me. Which they did. They sat me down and told me the bad news. I was off the tour. Sahib Shihab would come on on baritone and the baritone player, Tom Kubis, would move over to lead alto.

I packed my horns up and threw them into the trunk of my Corolla and headed back to the Valley. When I walked into the house I remembered Mom and Dad were gone for the weekend. Dad was playing the Concord Jazz Festival with Louie Bellson.

I felt very let down. When Dad called I told him them news, and they were as disappointed as I was (although I think my mother was secretly a little relieved).

The good thing that came out of this is that Dad relayed the story to Louie Bellson and a few months later I got a call from Nick DiMaio,

Louie's contractor, asking me to play a week at Disneyland with Louie's big band. This gig led to several years' concerts, tours and recordings with Louie which featured musicians like Blue Mitchell, Snooky Young, Pete Christlieb, Britt Woodman, Benny Powell, Don Menza and Cat Anderson.