



His grandfather offered to buy a shoeshine kit for Doug Webb after he told the family that he wanted to study music in college. The often anonymously documented woodwind artist has since developed a niche in the studios for making really beautiful music with a lot of different instruments.

By RA Monaco

“**M**Y LACK of success as an artist, made me a more rounded musician—a stronger musician—in a lot of ways,” said Doug Webb, who is “still making progress.” Most of Doug’s successes have come by way of making his living as an LA studio musician. Is there anyone who hasn’t heard his soprano saxophone solo on the theme from the TV series *Law and Order*?

While Doug’s been documented musically in some ways, “usually it’s

anonymously,” commented the remarkable jazz trumpeter Ron Stout, who shared sideman duties with Webb in the mid-90’s on the Horace Silver Band. “It’s been a double-edged sword for Doug—the fact that he’s been able to be successful making a living with the studio thing,” Stout observed.

Doug’s saxophone playing wasn’t overlooked by well-known record producer Richard Perry, who has captured Webb’s woodwind work on modern releases with Rod Stewart, Carly

Simon, Art Garfunkel and many other artists over the last 13 years.

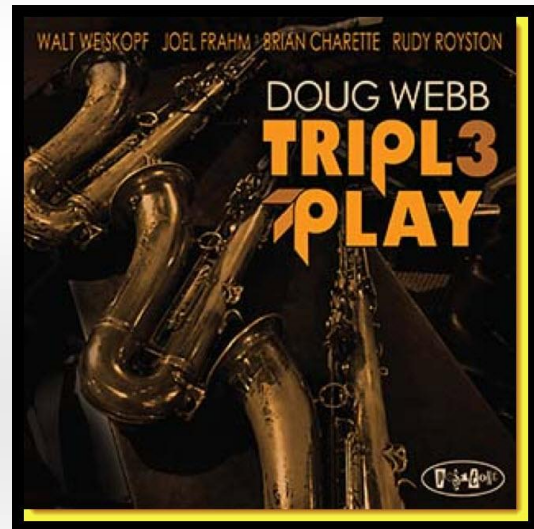
“It was a thrill to work with someone that was such a perfectionist,” said Webb, about producer Richard Perry. When Doug would go into the studio, Richard would tell him what he wanted. “I’d ask him not to cut-up my solos and so I would play solos and work on it with him, sometimes for hours,” Webb explained.

Perry would then send the recordings off to Clive Davis who would come back with constructive criticisms like, “He’s not playing the melody.” So, they’d go back into the studio and Perry would relay their discussion. “I would play mostly the melody and do a little thing on the end,” says the dedicated woodwind artist, who prefers choosing his own notes.

“I didn’t want him to cut up my solos and they didn’t,” said Doug, who noted the benefit was that “I started quoting the melody a lot more,” which led to doing gigs with a lot of singers. “I really enjoyed working with Richard—I think working for him made me better,” said Webb.

Newest Posi-Tone release

Just released, is Doug Webb’s 6th album for the Posit-Tone label, *Triple Play*. Produced by Marc Free and recorded in New York City, Webb is joined by East Coast tenor saxophone men Walt Weiskopf and Joel Frahm, along with Brian Charette on organ and Rudy Royston on drums.



Webb says that he enjoys working with Marc Free because he’s more about the art and creating something. “I started writing a lot more because Posi-Tone wanted me to write originals—I really feel good about some of the things I’ve written,” says Webb, who credits Marc Free for getting new things out of the artists he signs. “He’s adamant that I write original songs,” Webb added.

Still untitled, Webb has another quartet record which he recorded while in New York, the day before *Triple Play*. Doug hopes it will be released this year and says “I feel really good about that record,” noting that he’d written all the music for that project.

Emotions you can’t get with words

Scheduled for release the first Tuesday after Halloween, is “*I’ll be Home for Christmas*,” a Holiday Season album which Webb put together with piano player and arranger Cory Allen for Rhombus Records.

Doug is backed by a full orchestra—strings and all—on a few songs which Cory Allen arranged and Webb orchestrated. Interestingly, Allen who is also a master engineer professionally focused on the manipulation of perception with the intent of altering a listener’s state of consciousness—Grinch beware!

There is a lush emotional beauty and warmth in these well-crafted recordings that is certain to win over even the Grouchiest-Grinch and inspire the spirit of the Holidays.

“The whole thing that makes jazz successful, is the fact that it can touch on those emotions,” commented the poetically tasteful trumpeter Ron Stout, while discussing Webb’s work and his recent recordings on another project with jazz pianist Alan Broadbent, bassist Putter Smith and drummer Paul Kreibich.

Already mastered, though still untitled, this recording will surely be earmarked as a timeless treasure in the music libraries of many. From start to finish, the melodic virtuosity of this quartet playing often traveled standards like I Remember You, Star Eyes, All The

Things You Are and My Shining Hour—just naming a few—is nothing less than extraordinary.

In discussing the beauty of Webb’s work with Broadbent, Smith and Kreibich, Stout was intuitively quick to recognize the “challenge and futility of trying to describe a music that expresses emotions you can’t get to with words.”

“He’s a very virtuous player needless to say,” commented Paul Kreibich, about Webb’s playing on their recent recordings with Alan Broadbent and Putter Smith.



Doug Webb



He told me to get taps for my shoes

Up until his senior year in high school, Doug Webb admittedly never really practiced more than twenty minutes at a time. The realization that he didn't want to do anything else—especially get a job and have someone tell him what to do—and that nobody was going to pay him to sit around and watch TV all day, was the fuel that motivated Doug to get serious about his commitment to playing saxophone and becoming a professional musician.

His grandfather James Sisk and parents had saved up some money for him to go to college, so Doug knew that he was going to get a college education, but “they really tried to dissuade me from going into music,” said the musician, who always thought he could be good if he practiced.

The idea didn't set well with his entire family, “especially, my grandfather, who just thought it was the worst idea in the world,” Doug remarked about his mother's father.

“My grandfather didn't have a very high opinion of musicians, he basically thought of musicians as panhandlers and offered to buy me a shoeshine kit” instead, said Webb. “He told me I should get taps for my shoes,” describing the reaction of Grandpa Sisk.

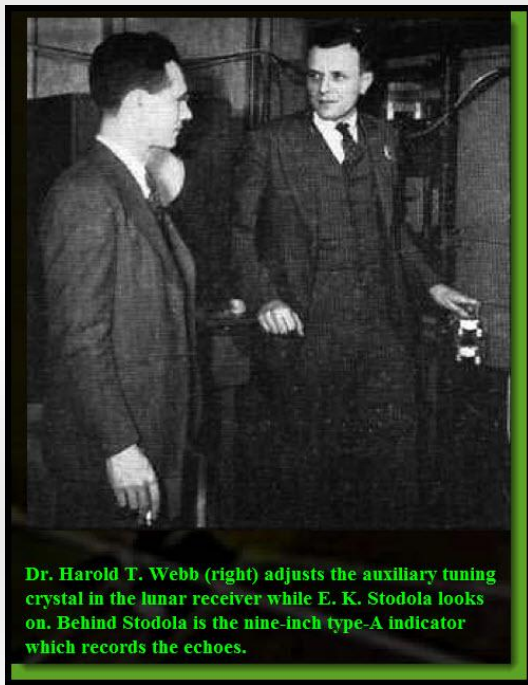
Project Diana

On the other side the family, Doug's grandfather Harold Donovan Webb, wasn't particularly supportive in those moments either.

Having earned an A.M. degree in Physics in 1932 and a Ph.D. from Indiana University in 1939, Dr. Harold

D. Webb was a tenured professor of electrical engineering at the University of Illinois and also recipient of the Everett Award for teaching excellence.

As a civilian scientist with the U.S. Army Signal Corps, Doug's grandfather was part of a team in 1946, which sent the first radar signals through the ionosphere to the moon and received the return echoes.



Dr. Harold T. Webb (right) adjusts the auxiliary tuning crystal in the lunar receiver while E. K. Stodola looks on. Behind Stodola is the nine-inch type-A indicator which records the echoes.

Shortly after World War II, military leader's, concerned that the Soviet Union would soon have long-range missiles and possibly nuclear weapons, were anxious to learn whether long-range radar could be used to detect incoming ballistic missiles. The program was called Project Diana.

“There was a picture of him on the cover of *Look* and *Time Magazine*,” said Doug proudly, recalling the accomplishments of his grandfather. “So, he didn't have a high opinion of musicians,” admitted the

grandson, who prevailed and went on to graduate the Berklee College of Music.

“I remember my grandfather watching the Johnny Carson Show and telling me, ‘Doc Severinsen and those guys are the best musicians in the world,’” said Doug, who in turn argued, “I could play with those guys.” ““Oh no, you couldn't—they're the best musicians in the world,” his grandfather told him.

The irony of their differences fully resolved when Doug became a member of the Tonight Show Band shortly before Johnny Carson retired. “I think Pete Christlieb decided he no longer wanted to play in the band, so I essentially took his place,” said Webb.

Eventually, Doug went to Champaign, Illinois, with Doc's band, where both sets of his grandparents had lived. “My grandmother came to the show—my grandfather had already died, but he had known that I'd been playing with Doc Severinsen,” said the grandson-musician. “I guess when I got that gig they thought I must be okay,” reflected Webb, who tour with Doc Severinsen from 1993 until 2006.



Freddie Hubbard was a leader in every sense on the bandstand

After-dark historians of the 1980's will no doubt remember the original Elario's, high above the Summerhouse Inn in La Jolla, which was where Doug Webb—then twenty-seven—really went to work with Freddie Hubbard for the first time. “Freddie didn't have a book—you had to know his stuff, so I brought all the fake books, I brought every tune I ever heard him play,” recalled Webb, who said that at the rehearsal Hubbard asked him to bring a flute the next day to play on, Up Jumped Spring.

Doug drove back up to LA from San Diego to get his flute for the next day and did some practicing on Up Jumped Spring, until he felt pretty good on it.

The following night, Freddie had just finished his solo on the Clare Fisher bossa nova Pensativa and was getting a huge applause when he turned to Doug and said, “Flute.” “What?” Doug responded, to which Freddie repeated the instruction with an expletive telling him to play flute. “If you know that tune, it's not the easiest tune in the world” said Webb, who was transposing the changes down a whole step.



“So, you do what the leader says,” said Webb, who, after thinking about the experience, considers it one of “the greatest gig of my life—but at the time, I was too scared to enjoy it like I would today, if I got the opportunity.” That was in 1988, when “Freddie was at the absolute peak of his playing,” recalls Webb.

“What I learned with Freddie most, probably, was his command of the rhythm section—it was his show every minute that it was going on,” said Webb. “You hear a lot of trumpet players, but they don't really lead the rhythm section the way Freddie could—basically, he was the leader out there in every sense.”



Doc Severinsen

On the road with Doc Severinsen

Doug would alternate tours with Horace Silver and then Doc Severinsen, which, to him, felt like family. “Being on the road can be a very lonely life,” offered Webb, who thinks it’s important that everybody is embraced like a family. “I think that came from Doc, we’d all go out to dinner—Doc was actually a cool guy,” said Webb.

“I had a great time on Doc’s band,” said Webb, recalling the fun he had hanging out with Ernie Tack—a bass-bone player who danced funny. “Those guys had a lot of stories,” said Doug, as he measured the memories, excitedly adding, “Ed Shaughnessy used to live with Charlie Parker in the mid-50’s before Charlie died!”

The great lead trumpeter Snooky Young did every single one of those tours,

Webb remembers—“he never missed a gig.” In fact, it was Doug’s job to help Snooky through the airports—“I would push his wheelchair.” “I remember right after 9/11 for some reason, security asked him to take his shoes off on four separate occasions—in the same airport,” recalled Webb. Snooky, who was a little hard of hearing at the time, kept saying, “They want me to do what?”

Doug remembers Snooky warmly as a “really a great gentleman,” who, as a lead trumpeter, played in the ensembles of Count Basie, Lionel Hampton, Benny Goodman and many others. Snooky shared stories with Doug going back to 1939, when he played with the Jimmie Lunceford Band, a band that differed from many of the other big bands of the 1930s and 1940s—noted less for its soloists than for its ensemble work.

Greatly influence by John Coltrane

People at times have told Doug that he sounded like John Coltrane. “I’ve always tried to find myself through whatever kind of music that I’m playing,” explained Webb, who went on to say that “when you’re playing your influences come out—people have told me I sound like Stan Getz too.”

At sessions, it’s not an uncommon experience for him to be asked to play like Clarence Clemons, Junior Walker or even Kenny G, which Doug clearly takes in stride. “I’m fairly good at capturing something about their playing—but I’m not playing exact licks,” says Webb.



Ralph Penland

“I will definitely admit to having been greatly influenced by Coltrane,” Doug added, before relating a discussion he’d had with the late great Ralph Penland—a drummer Doug had worked with 100’s

of times before his passing in March of 2014. Penland’s credits as a drummer, read like the who’s who of the music business from Frank Sinatra, Herbie Hancock and Carlos Santana to Chaka Kahn and the Supremes.

According to Ralph Penland, when hard bop saxophonist Steve Grossman first came on the scene in New York, everybody was angry at him and thought he was playing too much like John Coltrane, who had just died. Because everyone had such a deep spiritual connection to Coltrane, Grossman’s playing upset people according to Penland’s recount of the jazz scene in New York at the time.

“Well, it didn’t upset Miles Davis,” thought Webb, pointing out that Grossman “became Miles sax player.” Ralph’s story was interesting to Doug, because Grossman never sounded like Coltrane to him, noting that Steve “took the music in a new direction.”

In discussing John Coltrane with Doug, it was easy to sense that he’d fully adopted that same searching, always trying to do something different approach in his own career. “I would say that his music inspires me more than probably any other artist—it inspires me to want to play,” Webb offered freely, reflecting on Coltrane’s impact.

Webb's organic Coltrane connection—Art Davis

Shortly after graduating from Berklee and returning to California, Doug had the good fortune of meeting bassist Art Davis, who was the featured soloist at a concert organized by the late Dr. Charles Rutherford at Orange Coast College.

At the performance, Davis and Webb were paired on the John Coltrane composition Naima, a timeless ballad. “I didn’t know there was anybody out here that played like that,” Davis told Doug, adding that “it was great hearing” him.

Shortly after that concert, Art Davis moved to Orange County and asked Webb to help put a band together. Doug worked with Davis for 17 years after, frequently playing at the Café Lido, where he was often joined by drummer Paul Kreibich, who fondly chuckled remembering Davis as a patient man that tolerated their youthful antics.

“We had a gig every year on Coltrane’s birthday,” recalls Doug, about the years he’d spent working with Art Davis—who had had a long-running collaboration with the immortal John Coltrane. At some point, the band was joined by Billy Higgins and Horace Tapscott, recalls

Doug, who went on to mention that they played at a lot of festivals but regrettably, “we never toured and never recorded.”



Art Davis

Playing Coltrane’s music with Art Davis and Billy Higgins—who had substituted for Elvin Jones while Coltrane was alive—gave the music a validity to Webb’s interpretations, “as opposed to me going off and trying to sound like Coltrane.” They were organic to that music and Doug thinks, in part, “responsible for the way it sounded.” “That music has spirituality to it” says Webb, “having played the music with Art, really was one of the great experiences of my life.”



One For Art

Webb wishes that his musical journey with Art Davis had been more documented. “I was a pallbearer who helped carry the casket” at Art’s funeral, recalled Doug, after being asked about his composition *One For Art*, which he recorded on his 5th Posi-Tone release, *Another Scene*.

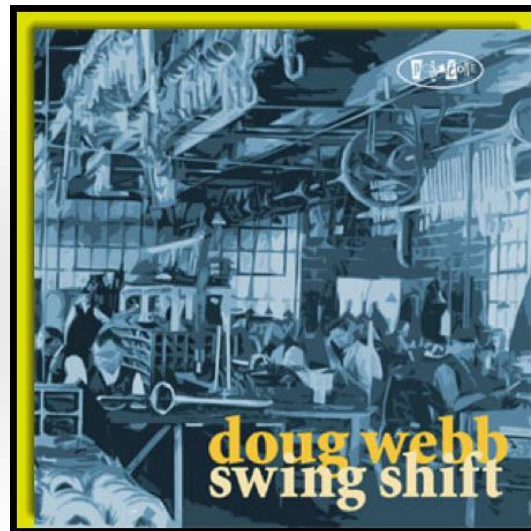
“I call it a dirge—it’s two choruses of that going into a drum solo and then a faster blues,” says Webb, recalling a similar tune that Art composed in three movements which they had played together. Like Davis’ composition, *One For Art* begins as a New Orleans style funeral march that transitions into a second movement representing the preaching and then the joy of ascending to heaven. Traditionally, that’s how a lot of jazz music originated.

Coltrane’s impact on drummers and sax players

“I would play a lot with just drummers,” said Webb, who recalled playing duets almost daily with Jeff ‘Tain’ Watts while they were at Berklee. “Say you’re a young sax player and you really want to

get better, you’ll get a lot more accomplished in a half-hour doing that than you do playing in a big band,” reasons Webb, adding he would do that all the time.

“If you listen to the music of John Coltrane,” began Webb, “the most exciting the music gets is when McCoy would stop playing and then, when Jimmy Garrison would stop playing, it would get to a whole other level and Trane would just go nuts!” “The form would be there, the tunes would be there,” explained the enthusiastic Doug Webb, who added, “The drummer gets to do so much more.”



Webb’s playing with Gerry Gibbs on his own composition *Rizone*, reflects the full embrace of those blistering moments of excitement between Elvin Jones and John Coltrane. The drummers and sax players who love those Coltrane-Jones moments can hear the white hot Webb-Gibbs’ interpretation on Doug’s *Swing Shift* album, which was also produced by Marc Free for the Posi-Tone label.

Webb’s developed a niche as a guy who offers options

“The other thing that is really unique about Doug Webb and I can’t think of any other player in town like this,” says the highly regarded Ron Stout, is that “he maintains his purity even though he does commercial work.” “This is really a rare thing” said Stout, who has observed commercial work creep into and water down the straight ahead playing of other musicians. “Doug can play funk, he can play commercial, but it has never sneaked into his straight ahead playing,” says the respected jazz trumpeter, commenting “he’s able to flip the switch on and off.”



Ron Stout

Through the grapevine, Ron Stout has heard that Doug is man to call around LA, “if you want a guy to come in and give you all kinds of options.” While he doesn’t do a lot of studio work, Paul Kreibich was also aware that Doug gets “called because he plays all the different horns—strange horns that composers come up with that they want.”



Paul Kreibich

According to the well traveled saxophonist and session-man Brandon Fields, “the most important aspects that I get from Doug, is his dedication to woodwinds.” Doug really does have a handle on the different instruments and their function, according to Fields who says, Webb “has a creativity that comes along with making really beautiful music out of all these different instruments that he happens to love playing.”



Brandon Fields

“I do have a lot of woodwinds that nobody else has,” admits Doug—including a Tubax, which is a contrabass saxophone with a range an octave lower than a baritone-saxophone. Webb says that he is the only guy around town who plays the E-flat Tubax that owns it, adding, “It’s a great instrument, because it’s incredibly in-tune and you can play it softer than a regular contrabass-sax.”



Doug Webb

Recently, Webb acquired a B-flat Tubax, which he says plays an octave lower than a bass-sax—down to the A-flat below a piano, making it the lowest woodwind ever made. “It’s really easy to play in-tune,” Doug says, “I can play base lines on it and not get tired.”

Add to those options, ethnic woodwinds, bamboo saxophones and Chinese flutes and Doug Webb is your guy. In fact, he recorded the music for the Clint Eastwood film *Gran Torino*, where he says that he played all Chinese flutes after listening to Vietnamese source music to catch the general idea.

“I take every gig I get called for,” says Doug, who recently played bass flute in an all flute orchestra, “it was really hard music!” “I try to do things outside my

comfort zone,” which is Doug’s approach to making progress.

Ultimately, doing what Webb does has made him a better musician and because of all his recording work, he thinks it’s probably made him more aware of pitch and playing in-tune than a lot of famous jazz musicians.



Music Doug would really enjoy

When asked if there were any musicians or bands he’d like to get called to play with, Doug’s immediate response was “sure, Rolling Stones that would be great!” “Jazz wise, Chick Corea—I’ve never played with Chick, though I’ve played with Stanley Clark a lot,” said Webb, who describes Stanley as a “real sweetheart” that’s provided him with important professional guidance. “I love working with Stanley,” Webb gushed, “he’s been really good to me over the years.” In fact, Doug has a solo on Stanley Clark’s newest record release.

“Herbie Hancock—there you go!” Webb added. Also, Doug wouldn’t mind playing with Keith Jarrett. “I never played with Elvin Jones either, though I played with McCoy Tyner once,” said the increasingly animated reed-man.

“There’re all kinds of great gigs—I’ve never played with Steely Dan,” said Webb, as though he was just promised a trip to the candy store.

Leading a group

“I almost never say no to a gig” said Doug, who is appreciative of anyone that calls him for any kind of work.

Doug would love to do a world tour as a leader with his own group. “Very few people are afforded that opportunity—like Branford Marsalis,” says Webb, with the goal of having everyone on his band’s play the best they’ve ever played.

“I try to space everything out so the guys get to do, what they do best,” says Webb, whose been told that some of the guys who’ve played on his band’s sound better when they play with him, than on their own gigs.

He regrets not recording himself more at a younger age, but knows he’s still getting better. “At a certain age, you start to see the light at the end of the tunnel,” says the gregarious woodwind artist. In the mean time, Doug’s still making progress.

