

Jean Bartlett (www.bartlettbiographies.com)

Portraits & Roots

A 2009 Breakfast Concert with John L. Worley Jr. (page 1)



Kerri's Coffee Shop in Pacifica is gone now and the last time I saw John he was clean shaven. But what hasn't changed since this in-depth 2009 interview I did with the trumpet/flugelhorn legend for my then online magazine, BASSO (Bay Area Artists Sing Out), is the talent of the man. All these years later, the mostly Daly City-raised musician - who has played with the likes of Pete and Sheila Escovedo, Wayne Wallace, Lila Downs and Ella Fitzgerald - has still got "it" and his interview still swings.

Written by Jean Bartlett

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Pacifica, California

It's 10 a.m. at Kerri's Coffee Shop in Pacifica's Linda Mar Center. This is a great place. One bottle each – catsup, mustard, Worcestershire, steak sauce and Tabasco – share the Formica tabletop with silver defined cradles of cream and sugar. A tin napkin holder sits back and center against the wall and a couple of menus beckon the customer to chow down. The waitresses are friendly. They ask you how you are doing and wait for an answer. The coffee doesn't pull any frou-frou nonsense and is poured as often as you like. And the food is good.

Three booths up from the back sits a guy who has dropped a lot of world-wide jaws with his intimate precision and soaring melodies on trumpet and flugelhorn. His name is John L. Worley Jr. He's played with big world ticket names. He's played with local legends. Turns out the waitress's husband played a few gigs with John back in the 1980s. John Worley is a nice guy. He's as generous with a good conversation as he is with a good song and in the world of an interviewing writer, John is a terrific gig.



John Worley, hitting the high notes at Kerri's Coffee Shop, Feb. 26, 2009. Jean Bartlett photo

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It was by his design that John became a musician. "To be honest, I don't have a lot of memories about my parents encouraging me with music," Worley said. "I had to make my own way. I was sneaking out of my house when I was 14 years old, taking the bus down to Market Street in San Francisco listening to bands play. I'd sneak out at 10 at night and come back at 3 or 4 in the morning. Luckily I didn't get into trouble."

John's father, John Leonard Worley was from Pensacola, Florida. "My father liked music. We always had the 'Exotic Guitars of Hawaii' playing at the house, or Charlie Pride or Hank Williams because my dad was a real big country western fan."

Worley's father played pedal steel guitar when he was a kid and was apparently quite good at it. "Some guy wanted to take my father on the road but my dad enlisted in the Merchant Marine and shipped out instead."

Worley Sr. met Hana Konishi in Japan. "My dad met my mom in a restaurant in Kyoto, where she worked. They hooked up and whenever my dad's ship would come into port, she would take the train to meet him and follow him to the various ports on his itinerary.

"My dad loved coming to San Francisco – it sure beats the hell out of Pensacola! So after my dad and mom got married, they moved to San Francisco in 1952. She didn't know anyone and she couldn't speak English very well."

John, who is the eldest of four siblings – two sisters and two brothers – was born in 1955. His mother spoke to him in Japanese although she stopped that when he was fairly little because she wanted all of her kids to be as "American" as possible. John has no recollection of speaking Japanese.

"Back then there was a lot of racial prejudice against Asians," Worley said. "It didn't matter where they were from. They were all 'chinks,' 'japs,' 'slant eyes,' etc. I heard it all and was really aware of it. I remember in kindergarten and first grade, the Hispanic, African American and Asian American kids would hang out together because the white kids would try to beat us up. I remember a time when these white kids came around with jeans and black leather jackets and they had these spears they had made from Eucalyptus trees. They were chasing us with their spears and we were throwing rocks at them. My friend hit this one kid, the head guy, right in the forehead with a rock which cut him pretty badly and they left us alone. We felt so powerful. We stood up to maybe 15 or 20 kids. It was empowering!"

Out of the four Worley kids, John is the only one to play music. However, John's grandfather owned a guitar. "My dad's dad loved music. He would take the guitar and he would make a bar chord and strum it and hum something and then he would make another bar chord and strum it and hum something else."



John remembers his first childhood home; an apartment in a building at Gough and Oak in San Francisco. "I have really vivid memories dating back to that time. I remember seeing my first marching band and their colors were silver and red. Later on when I was taking trumpet lessons, I met this kid who went to Washington High School in San Francisco and he told me, those colors, were their colors. Funny how something sticks with you but I guess I recall that band on Market because that's the first time it registered – this is a band."

John and his family lived in San Francisco from 1955 to 1958. They moved to Daly City from 1958 to 1963 and then to Rohnert Park (Russian River country) from 1963 to 1965. "My dad wanted to be more in the country but we moved back to Daly City in 1965 and stayed."

John's father's job took him out to sea – a lot. "When I was young, my father wasn't around much. He would come home and I wouldn't know who he was. So my father and I never really bonded and he resented that all through my life. We never saw eye to eye on too many things. And then my wanting to go into music – he just wasn't that into it."

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Drums were John's first entry into music.

"I started on drums in the 4th grade at John Reed Elementary in Rohnert Park," Worley said. "Ringo Starr and the Beatles were my inspiration. I used to line up my dad's coffee cans with the plastic lids, get my mom's chopsticks, and then when the Beatles would come on (radio or TV), I would pound the chopsticks against the drums!"

"I got in the band at school and nobody really taught you how to play. They just stuck stuff at you and said, 'Here's some drumsticks and here's a drum. 'L' means left hand and 'R' means right.' So you go, boom, boom, beep – boom, boom, beep. Left, left, right. Left, left, right. Do a drum roll. I knew nothing about music," John laughed. "I remember we all had to rotate to the various instruments and it was my turn to play glockenspiel and the principal of the school came in to check us out. Mrs. Morgan (band teacher) started the band and looked at me and mouthed, 'Play.' Okay! So I took these mallets for the glockenspiel and started banging the hell out of it. Bam, bam, bam, bam, crash and Mrs. Morgan just has this big smile on her face!"

Worley's good friend John Anderson was playing French horn in the school band. It was John's first introduction to a brass instrument.

"I remember he had my drumsticks and I had his French horn and we went and had our own parade. We're marching down the street and he's whacking away on the drum and I'm making these God awful sounds like a turkey being strangled (on the French horn) – and we're just having the time of our lives!"

Worley didn't pick up a brass instrument again until he hit the 5th grade.

"I first saw a story on Louis Armstrong in *Reader's Digest Treasury of Short Stories* when I was in 4th grade," Worley said. "It was just a collection of short stories and one happened to be on him. But on the back of the book there was a picture of Louis playing his gold trumpet. And I thought, 'How cool is that?' Then in the article Armstrong talked about how he played for all these people and the sense that I got out of it was, that wherever Louis Armstrong went, he didn't have to know their language. He could just play his horn and people could relate to it. I thought that was really cool."

"I was a shy kid, not very verbose," Worley continued. "The trumpet was the perfect outlet because it was loud."

The family moved back to Daly City in 1965 and John went to 5th and 6th grade at Jefferson Elementary in Daly City. The kids had the option of joining the band and John told his parents he wanted to play trumpet. His trumpet arrived on October 2nd, a day late but he still made band.

"I remember picking it up and putting it together and blowing into and I couldn't get a sound out of it," John laughed. "I told my mom, hey, I can't get a sound of it. There's something wrong with it! But she told me I'd learn."

The band teacher was Dick Snyder. "Dick Snyder played a little bit of everything, but saxophone was his main instrument. He also played valve trombone and he showed us the fingerings which are the same as the trumpet."

John said he did not show ability on trumpet in 5th or 6th grade, in fact he said he was terrible at it. But he did have an incredible sense of music that just sort of presented itself when he was about seven.



"I could listen to the radio and sing all the songs I heard, after just one listen. I had this sense of being able to mimic anything that I heard and I had this intuition that just knew, by the very front end of how a word was enunciated, what that word was. And I could hear the pitch and sing along with it and change pitches instantly, the same as what the singer did. I didn't think anything of it. I could just do it. That's easier to do with voice, not as easy with trumpet. You're born with your vocal chords and to learn to do that on trumpet takes forever."

The other thing that kept John going on the trumpet, when all

the notes were coming out wrong, was he told his teacher Dick Snyder that he was going to have to quit because the trumpet was making him cough a lot. And Dick Snyder looked at John and said calmly, "You'll get over it."

John went to Colma Intermediate for the 7th grade and the teacher needed low brass players – specifically baritones and mellophones. "I remember playing a mellophone and then she stuck me on baritone. It had a nice beautiful sound, but it smelled bad and it was an awful instrument (in terms of size and condition)."

When Worley started his freshman year at Jefferson High School he remembers the trumpet section screwing up a particular passage. "Our music teacher, Richard Larsen, went down from the top to the bottom, through every trumpet player. I was number 9 and I was the only one who played it right."

Dick Larsen looked at everyone, then looked at John and said, "You watch out for him. He's going to take your chair."

"In my squeaky voice I said, 'freshman power!' and of course, they all ganged up on me and pounded me after," John laughed.

"Dick Larsen told us about the San Francisco Fireman's Honor Band which rehearsed at Mission High School in San Francisco. I auditioned and made first chair, second cornet, which was pretty good – I was just a freshman. I got free lessons by being in the band. There was a conservatory in Burlingame, The Peninsula Conservatory of Music, and I got free trumpet lessons there from a guy named Owen Bruce.

"Owen had me play out of the *Arban's* book. They call it the trumpet player's bible. It was published in 1864 and it's never been out of print. The guy that wrote it, Jean-Baptiste Arban, was the cornet instructor at the Paris Conservatory. He elevated the status of the cornet to a solo instrument, similar to the flute, the violin and the clarinet.

"I still practice out of that book. It takes most players a lifetime to really master it. I teach with a lot of newer books and methods but I make every one of my students buy an *Arban's* book when they get past their third year."

Perhaps the biggest lesson Worley received in freshman year was from his English teacher, Bruce Williamson. The first day of class he sat the freshmen down and said, "You know, you've been learning how to read and write for nine years. Now, I'm going to teach you how to communicate with the person sitting next to you."

"So we arranged all the chairs in a circle and for the whole semester, all we did was sit and talk," Worley said. "He brought up issues like stereo types, race, and gender – and just really got it down to the bare bones on how to understand the person that you are with or talking to and how to listen to that person. How to not look at somebody just on the outside, but go past that, go further in. At 13-years-old, that is powerful."

Later on John read other books that really encouraged that kind of thinking. *Born To Win* (Lewis Timberlake and Marie Reed) talked about transactional analysis – the three ego states: parent, adult and child.

"Most people when they have communication problems, it's because they communicate from one ego state to the next and these states are not compatible. That made a lot of sense to me and this took it one step further on how to relate to people. Now I figure out how a person tries to interact with me and then learn how to turn it around into a more positive experience."

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Hearing Maynard Ferguson playing the trumpet solo in "Concerto to end all Concertos" with Stan Kenton's Big Band on the "Kenton in Hi-Fi" recording, really tuned Worley in to just what the trumpet could do. "It was the most tremendous thing to hear and I really, really wanted to do that."

Around this time, John began to study with local trumpet teacher Johnny Coppola. Johnny used to play on the Kenton band with Maynard and influenced many – if not most – of the trumpeters in the Bay Area for the last 50 plus years.

"I remember my first lesson with John. I was nervous and shaking quite a bit. I gradually got over it and learned a great deal from him. When I lost my job at Whitney's Band Instruments, I told him that I couldn't take lessons anymore. He asked me why and I said it was because I lost my job and my parents wouldn't pay for my lessons. So he said, 'Keep coming and you can be my 'cherry.' Just sweep my porch or something and everything would be fine.' So after my lessons, I would ask him what I should do. He replied, 'Go home and practice. If you do everything I tell you, you'll be a professional musician by the time you're sixteen.'"

Another influential person in John's life was classmate, Johnny Serrano, another student of Johnny Coppola.

"My friend Johnny Serrano was two years older than me and he sort of took me under his wing. He introduced me to the recordings of artists like Stan Kenton and other jazz greats. His dad was a musician and his father's band was the first professional band I had ever heard. They played at the Latin American Club in San Francisco on 3rd Street, right next to the police station. I remember being there at age 13 or 14, and drinking my first alcoholic drink – a Seven and Seven. I was just this little kid. But they had an arrangement back then. The dads would bring the kids around to listen to music and if we were lucky, we got to sit in. If the cops came around, then we would get our instruments and go on the stand and fake like we were playing."

"Johnny's the one that took me to my first gig. I was 15 and it was at the Kabuki Theatre in San Francisco. We played in a band called the Far East Coalition. We shared the bill with two other bands: Sand and the Intrigues. Trumpeter Gary Woods was in Sand and another trumpeter Jerry Lum played in the Intrigues. All four trumpet players on that gig are still alive and everybody except Johnny is still playing."

Worley got paid a whopping 8 bucks for that gig. "When I got in there it was a sea of tables and I was thinking this is so cool being some place like this. Then all the customers came in and I had never seen so many beautiful Asian women in my life. This was an Asian youth dance thing. I had always had the thing about Marilyn Monroe – tall blonde; my girlfriend was a tall blonde. It was just so weird seeing so many beautiful Asian women in one place."

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"My first solo was the opening to Tower of Power's, 'You're Still A Young Man,' and I cracked the first note. But it was like a dream come true to play some place and actually get paid to do it."

Worley reiterates that he did not have a natural ability on trumpet. But people liked him and they gave him chances. And those lessons at the Peninsula Conservatory really got him on the right track as did getting together with Johnny Serrano.

"The thing that got me going more than anything was – I was this really small guy but when I picked up the trumpet, I had this really big sound. And if you have a big sound, you can go anywhere because people think you are really good. For instance, Oceana High School teacher Robert Shed conducted the district honor band one year and I auditioned and made principal trumpet. I couldn't play as well as those other guys; but I had a sound that they didn't. Same thing when I was in junior college. I auditioned for the Northern California Junior College Wind Ensemble and Orchestra and I made principal trumpet in both. It wasn't because I was better than those other guys. In fact it was the opposite. But I had a bigger sound and I played with confidence."

Once Worley played the Kabuki, the gigs kept coming. He played in Latin rock bands, rock bands and jazz bands.

"In 1971, I played at the Reno Jazz Festival with the Skyline College Night Band under Billy Robinson," Worley said. "Somebody said to Billy, 'Hey, we could use another trumpet player. Why don't we call this kid who goes to Jefferson?' So I went to Reno with them and that was fun. Then I went to school at CSM (College of San Mateo) during the day and I'm out gigging at night. I also had a few odd jobs in there. I worked at Serramonte Music. I worked at a place called, Rent A Bug (a Volkswagen rental car company). I got fired from Rent A Bug for whistling! I was whistling bebop all the time there and the boss just hated it."

"A couple of years later, I was playing and touring with a band out of Union City and we would play all over the place. We went to Mexico, up to Washington and all over California. I wound up hearing about Marriott's Great America (now California's Great America) and all the really good, young musicians were auditioning and playing there during the summer. I thought, 'I'm pretty good. I could play there.' So I auditioned and got second trumpet in the Broadway show, which was a pretty cush gig. Everyone else was marching around wearing minute men costumes or dressed like clowns – and I got to sit in the pit, dress nice and play in air conditioning!"



"I played there all summer and met an 18-year-old guy named Louis Fasman who was a phenomenal lead trumpet player. The guy had chops up the ying-yang. We got to be really good friends. He told me he was going back to De Anza College (Cupertino, CA) in the fall to play in the band and I should go too. He told me that 'Doc' Patnoe, a

tremendous educator and great trumpet player was there conducting, and I knew Doc. He used to (substitute) conduct the night band up at Skyline when I was there. So I went to school there and studied with Doc for a year. He taught me so much about playing the trumpet – the technical and physical aspects of it. He had a lot going on and in that year, I experienced tremendous growth. Not only did my jazz playing start to blossom but my lead chops did as well. Hanging out with Louis and Doc and practicing all the time – it was really something."

By then John had been teaching privately for two years and was really developing that part of his music expertise. He had 40 students a week, was going to school five days a week, working at a music store two days a week and gigging. Somewhere in there he met someone and almost got married. But the schedule was beginning to get to him and he just kind-of burned out.

Still, John and his friend Louis managed to attend a concert at Foothill College (up the street from De Anza,) where there were all these different college bands from around the country. When CSULA (California State University, Los Angeles) played, Louis and John looked at each other and said, "Man, I want to go to school there."

"They were playing the best music," Worley said, and a couple of friends, a littler older than Louis and John, had made the big move to LA and were in the CSULA Band.

CSULA Jazz Band director Bob Curnow was also Stan Kenton's producer. When Stan passed away, Bob had Kenton's whole library for the year John and Louis were at CSULA. "We played the shit out of the Kenton book. The CSULA Big Band was one of the best collegiate big bands in the country at the time."

Worley also worked in the school pub making pizzas and serving beer. Additionally John had his own band, Restless Natives. "Every Wednesday night we played in the school pub, mixing avant-garde music with poetry."

Worley said he knew instantly that LA was the right move to make. Right around the corner from where they lived there was a McDonald's that played John Coltrane over the loudspeakers. "We knew we were in the land of jazz. We would go to this place called 'Pippy's' and sit in on jam sessions with all these great jazz players. Man, we were in seventh heaven. I met this trumpet player there named Hadji and he walked in with this big old fedora hat and he could really play."

Like so many musicians John has met, their paths would cross again. That next time was in a band with James Brown at the Fairmont Hotel. Both men were playing trumpet.

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"When I was living in LA the school year came and went," Worley said. "It was summer time and I didn't have a job and then this opportunity came up, Circus Vargas. They paid \$350 a week to be in the band and that wasn't bad money back then."

"The band for the circus was incredible," Worley continued. "It was the first time I ever played in a band where I knew what it was like to be in a flock of birds. Let me explain this. When you're playing music and you play something, like in jazz, you have this conversation with the rhythm section. With the circus, we played the music so much that one person would play a quote from another song and bam; we were off playing that song. And then the person leading it at this point would say, okay we're going to do this and bam, we did it. It was exciting. Never played in a band like that since. The closest band to come to this was a band I co-led with Jim Norton called, Brilliant Corners."

Worley said there was all kinds of talent in that circus band.

"One of the lead trumpet players, Roger Ingram, plays lead for Harry Connick Jr. and the Chicago Jazz Orchestra. Joe Farrell, a tenor saxophone legend also played with the circus band. He taught me how to play craps. Trombonist Eric Jorgensen plays in LA with everyone. Bruce Fowler had played with Zappa's band and so many more. First time I traveled with them I was on the road for 11 months, next time for 3 months and then a few months another time. The pay went up each time."

John also spent some time working on cruise ships. While the music on the cruise ships was more middle-of-the-road, John said that the experience was good; it took him to Hawaii for six and a half months as well as to Mexico, Japan and Alaska.

"I think the first major artist I ever played with was Glen Campbell and that was back in 1977," said John. "I never had an agent. The deal is when the people would come to town, they would need to hire an orchestra or a big band and someone would recommend me and that's how I got most of my work. People liked me. I worked with Glen Campbell. I went to Acapulco with the Fifth Dimension. I played with Tavares. I played with James Brown, Rosemary Clooney, Mel Tormé, Ella Fitzgerald and Judy Collins at places like the Fairmont Hotel, Bimbo's 365 Club, the Orpheum, the Warfield, etc.

"One time, when Tower Records was still open, I went to the vocal section on a lark and I picked out more than 50 different artists whom I had either gigged with or recorded with. I've played with a lot of people but that doesn't make me better than anyone else. It just gives you some insight into their musical reality. And that's all part of the process. You digest that."

Worley played for 10 years in San Francisco's annual Carnival Ball with Carnival music director, composer and arranger Celia Malheiros. As a member of the Malheiros founded Brazilian All Star Band, John was exposed to a lot of different styles of Brazilian music.

"It was interesting because I came from a jazz background where you tend to lay back on the beat a lot. What you find in Latin music, whether it's samba, mambo, songo or cha cha, is that you have to be on top of the beat. So when the horn players would play the sambas, we would typically either be on the beat or just a tad behind it. But in certain parts of Brazil, you have to be either on the beat or ahead of the beat just slightly. Celia's guitar player Carlos Oliveira would constantly tell us, 'You guys are dragging.' And we're all looking at each other, the horn players, and we're saying, 'We're not dragging. We're right on top of it.' And on and on went the battle – on the beat or behind the beat or ahead of the beat.

"I didn't realize exactly where Carlos was coming from until I hung out with Harvey Wainapel. Harvey is a master saxophonist in the East Bay and he traveled to Brazil and studied the music down there and he has this huge collection of music. So I went over to his house and hung out with him one time and he started playing some of this music and the horn players were just so on top of the beat and I was thinking how uncomfortable that must be. And then the light switch went on. I realized the whole time Carlos was telling me, I was dragging, it's because this is where he was from and this is what he was expecting us to do. Now it made all the sense in the world. The next time I saw Carlos I apologized to him."

Among John's gigs, was a very cool movie project.

"I was in the Bay Area Jazz Composers Orchestra and we did two recordings. One was with the Turtle Island String Quartet. We also did the soundtrack for this movie, 'All the Vermeers in New York.' Jon Jost was the director (1990 release) and Jon English was the conductor and composer. We recorded it at Skywalker and I got a feature solo that played at the end during the credits. This was one of my favorite pieces because Jon English's writing was incredible. He could take one note and then frame it with something else and create the perfect mood for the scene it was written for."

Among John's more recent music experiences are 15 years of gigs out of the last 17 years of the Monterey Jazz Festival.

"One of the most memorable gigs that I did was the Wayne Shorter concert at the 2001 Festival," Worley said. "We worked so hard and we were being broadcast live. In the first 20 minutes of that concert, I cracked a note really bad and I'm the solo trumpet player. I could feel my face getting really flushed and I'm really pissed. And then I stopped and thought – am I really going to let one note ruin this incredible experience? Then I gave myself some slack and had the best performance of my career. That was when I really learned to let go."

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In 2002, John pulled in some friends and created his own band, WorlView. His "WorlView" CD debuted in 2003. In 2004, WorlView played the San Jose Jazz Festival and in 2006 they hit the stage of the Monterey Jazz Festival. John said the title of his CD, which is also the name of his band, corresponds with his view of what his world has been. "It's a reflection of all the different styles and bands that I have played with over the years."

The WorlView CD features an incredible cast of virtuosic musicians: Wayne Wallace, Kristen Strom, Sebastien Lanson, Jim Norton, Murray Low, Paul van Wageningen, Jason Lewis, Jesus Diaz, David Belove, John Shiflett, John Carlos Perea and William Minenfield. The first person John thanks on his CD is his wife, artist Susan Worley.



**John Worley plays the stage of Pacifica Performances.**  
(Jean Bartlett photo)

"Because of Susan, I am able to play my music from a certain space. Because of Susan I am really present with my music."

"Susan's a tremendous artist," Worley continued. "Give her a piece of paper and she'll spring life out of that paper. Give her some clay and she makes magic."

Primarily a ceramicist and sculptor, Susan Worley is a major artist and several extraordinary representatives of her work, light up the jacket of John's CD. She is always introduced at John's concerts. The man is still very much head over heels.

"This CD was the start of everything in the second half of my life," Worley said. "And it almost didn't get made. The issue I had was money, but really it was more than just that. I didn't feel I was good enough."

His friend Brenda K. and subsequent co-producer asked John how much money it would take to make a CD. He told her \$20,000. A week went by and in the mail was a letter from Brenda that said, "Start with this."

"It was a check for \$10,000 and she told me not to pay her back," Worley said, still shaking his head with gratitude. "I added \$15,000 of my own money and hired Wayne Wallace as a producer and arranger. I also hired musicians that I respect and care for and who I knew would play the music the way that it should be played. I treated everybody the way that I want to be treated. I made sure they had the best coffee and great food. I didn't rush anybody. On the tune 'Rashaan's Run,' I wanted to do it as a straight-ahead, up tempo thing and the bass player said, 'No.' He said, 'I think we ought to do it like this.' He kind of sketched it out and the other guys said, 'Hey, let's do that. It's something different and the sound is terrific.' Now, we almost always do it as a closing tune."

While John has no complaints about his musical path, he clearly likes the shape of things since his founding of WorlView.

"I think the difference between what I did before and what I'm doing now is like night and day. Before, I would work with a lot of different people and I would be playing music, that wasn't really my music. I mean it comes from me, you know, my interpretation. But it's not the same thing as playing your heart's desire. And I think I am less serious now on the bandstand than I used to be. If I were to crack a note, I used to get really uptight. If something happened on the bandstand that made the band look terrible, I would really be mortified. But now there's a certain amount of levity on the bandstand. Even though we are serious artists," he laughed.

"Things happen – it's all part of the process. And it's fun. Sometimes okay, if my fingers feel like lumber and they don't want to work right, yeah, I'll get a little frustrated. I actually did some damage to one of my fingers in an

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accident. This finger doesn't work as fast as the others anymore – so it's smoke and mirrors time. That's how it works!

"So, I just sit and laugh about a lot of this stuff now. At Pacifica Performances, [www.pacificaperformances.org](http://www.pacificaperformances.org), I remember a couple of times playing something I didn't mean to play and what are you going to do?

"But for all my audiences, and this really works at a venue like Pacifica Performances, I try to pretend that the audience is in my living room and I'm entertaining them there. I just try to talk to them and also make them feel comfortable.

"How many times do we all go to that concert where there is that guy up there sitting behind a piano and he's playing Shostakovich or something and everybody is so serious and nobody even whispers and everyone is afraid to breathe? Now of course they are taken in by the moment of this great virtuosity – but at the same time, we humans are not silent creatures. We move. We itch. We twitch. We scratch. What are you going to do?

"If I am thinking about something that I know about a piece of music, I figure maybe somebody in the audience will want to know about it too. I'm going to share that something with them. I can't even count how many times people have come up to me and thanked me for talking to the audience. It's that sharing of the human experience."

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As far as best places to play, this trumpet player and flugelhornist who has played all over the world said, "It's not really the big venues, the jazz festivals and such, even though I have a great time and I love playing them. I'd much rather play in a small venue, where you can just sit back and relax.

"One of the most fun venues I ever played in was up in Seattle at a house concert at Lance and Laurie's. People come and bring food and wine. The owner of Columbia Crest Winery came to the concert and he brought several reserve bottles of different wines. I'm a big fan of good wines and the folks who make them.

"In fact, some of the most fun I've ever had at gigs has been associated with wine. I played at Sofia Coppola's wedding. The Rubicon was flowing that day. I played at Francis Ford Coppola's house, for his family, the day after Christmas one year. The whole band got to stay at the 'cow barn.' We had great food and wine and the Coppola family and staff served us and we all hung out talking at the table. It was just one of those incredible experiences.

"Another really fun experience was at the San Jose Jazz Festival when my friend Ray Vega came to town. He's one of my trumpet heroes. He'll just phone me up and say, 'Hey Worley, I got this trumpet...What do you think, man? What do you know about this horn?'"

"Admittedly, I'm a trumpet geek," Worley laughed. Worley who is a clinician/endorsing artist for Bach Stradivarius Trumpets. "I know a lot about trumpets, probably more than a lot of people.

"So my friend Ray is playing at the San Jose Jazz Festival and he's playing with some the people who play in my WorlView band – except now it's the Ray Vega Band. He's playing and I'm there listening and all of a sudden he says to me, 'Why don't you come up and sit in?' So I go up and the crowd goes crazy while Ray and I are playing. Cameras were flashing and I thought; this must be how it feels to be a movie star! It was so much fun!

"But you know, the Monterey Jazz Festival is pretty darn cool. I've played there with local artists like Bobby Hutcherson, Wayne Wallace, Jon Jang, etc., and a few artists from out of the area like: McCoy Tyner, Billy Childs, Don Byron, Carla Bley/Steve Swallow Big Band and Wayne Shorter. The guy who recorded the music from the Wayne Shorter CD, 'Alegria,' was this really famous New York studio trumpeter, Lou Soloff. I remember meeting him in 1976 when he was passing through San Francisco on a gig. He really made quite an impression on me from his early days with Blood Sweat and Tears.

"Years later I'm in the Minneapolis Airport and I've got my horn case and I see this other trumpet player walking towards me and we're like two cats sizing each other up. And I look at his upper lip and I said, 'You're Lou Soloff!'

Man, I met you back in 1976.' And he said, 'Who are you?' And I said, 'I'm John Worley.' And he said, 'I know you. You're famous.' And I said, 'No, I'm not famous, you're famous, dude.' So we started talking about our horns and then he tells me, 'Go buy a Power Ball ticket – it's a \$100 million dollars.'

"When I played with Carla Bley at the Monterey Jazz Festival, I was playing Lou's part. I was the featured soloist for the gig. Carla told me she called Lou and told him what a great job I was doing!

"You're just always meeting people in this business. It's crazy."

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Throughout his continued lifetime of music, Worley has really experienced what he learned long ago from that *Reader's Digest* read on Louis Armstrong. If you play an instrument, you can meet people through the language of music.

"I remember going to a music store in Hamburg, Germany after a tour with Jon Jang and the Pan Asian Arkestra. I was trying out some horns in this shop and people came in from the street to listen to me play. And then they started asking me questions, can you do this or that?

"The next week I was visiting a friend in Leiden, Holland. My friend told me I should take a break and go to Amsterdam and just hang out. When I got there I realized that I don't know anyone and I couldn't speak the language and I started to think... 'What am I going to do?' So I go into a music store and tried out some trumpets and people started coming in to talk to me."

John's music has taken him to Japan, Central America and Europe, three times. The first time he went to Europe was with the 49ers Band. He played for their exhibition game with the Dolphins. "I was the only guy who practiced every day. But at night I went to the pubs and checked out all the local beers and there were some really good ales and bitters. I played in Italy, France, Holland, Germany and in Switzerland. I also went on tour with the Louie Bellson and the Stanford Jazz Orchestra playing trumpet as well as mentoring.

"I think music offers so much. But it depends if the person listening is open to receiving it. For instance, when I look at a beautiful painting I can be captivated. It's the same thing with music. You've got to have the desire and the understanding to receive the composer/artists intention.

*Now people are exposed to music mostly through TV, as opposed to in the concert hall. This country is really screwed up that way. This country produces some of the finest artists in the world and there is no place for them to play. And there is no audience for them. They have to leave the country in order to express themselves. For instance, if I went to Japan, I would be playing 5 or 6 nights a week and touring all over the place. In Europe it would be the same thing. In the States to get a gig, especially jazz, it's tough.*

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"In Europe and Japan when you play, people listen. In the States, unless you are in a concert setting, nobody listens. I just think it's the way everything is structured, how people in this country are educated or not educated about music.

what you share. If you are not a part of an audience that listens to different kinds of live music – you're not going to get anything other than what's playing on your TV.

"I think people need to go out more and hear local artists. But if you want to hear somebody that you've heard online, on TV or in the movies, you have to spend \$100 bucks or more a ticket. Who wants to spend \$100 dollars?

What you wind up seeing is a big production. Where is the intimacy? How do we connect with the people on stage? The thing is there are so many great musicians in our local communities. My friend, trumpeter Lionel Emde, lives in Pacifica. He could have been one of the best trumpet players in the San Francisco Bay Area, but there is no place for him to play. He has to make a living doing something else. If people in local communities would support their local artists: potters, musicians, painters, writers, film makers and what have you – support them by going out and listening to them or reading their works, or checking out their art – and spend some money on something which totally enriches your life – then they would walk away with an experience that would change them. It gives you something to talk about. It makes you feel a certain way about life. You can hear all the famous people you want – but for a lot of them, they are here today and gone tomorrow, and they're not drinking your water. They're not eating the produce that's grown in your area. And we are all in touch with each other through these things so why not be a part of art that is local. I'm not against famous artists – I'm just really for incredibly excellent local artists.

"As to what kind of music I like? I like everything. I like music that makes me feel a certain way, doesn't matter the genre. For instance, on the way down here I was listening to Suzanne Brewer. She's an indie artist, living in Seattle now. I first heard her when my wife and I were in a coffee shop in Capitola. There she was sitting at the piano singing her songs and I thought, 'My goodness, who is this person?' When you listen to her, you just think, 'This is the real deal.'

"Suzanne's music is like the kind of music you sometimes hear on television shows like 'Grey's Anatomy,' or 'Brothers and Sisters,' or various television shows especially on ABC. You hear these types of artists because their music represents the kind of feeling they want you to have, because you don't always get it from the acting. That's Suzanne Brewer's music. At least that is how it is for me. I'm going to do a concert with her at some point.

"I just had my 16-year-old goddaughter, Layla Kovacevic, perform at my last gig. She's the daughter of two of my best friends and she can really sing." And as Worley knows, talent comes at every age and sometimes it takes a while to push its way out of an instrument.

"I would never tell any of my students to quit (Worley has 48 of them) and the reason why is, I don't think anyone should ever give up. Part of my job as a private teacher is also being a mentor. That means to help accentuate values like discipline and practicing and respecting the person next to you, treating the people you work with as an individual, just like you. I try to teach my students life lessons. I learned the hard way. I want them to know that when they go into a situation, they are not going into it blind. They have choices in how they react.

"But the trumpet is a tough instrument. It's demanding. It's a very physical instrument.

"There's an old trumpet saying. 'You miss a day, you feel it. You miss two days, you hear it. You miss three days, everyone else hears it.'

"I tell my students this. Even when you totally get the trumpet you are not always on top of your game. You have those moments that you strive for where there is certain clarity in an idea you play or – your sound suddenly has all the resonance that you feel inside. Then at other times, it's just work.

"In addition, I have my students look up major players like Louis Armstrong and Harry James. When Freddie Hubbard passed away, I related this to them and three-quarters of my students said, 'Who?' Now, they know who he is. I make them research the greats either on Google or YouTube. Since my Freddie Hubbard Tribute Concert at Yoshi's, I've been playing a lot of Freddie's music. He was a big influence on me."

People have asked John if he still gets nervous when he performs. They tell him he looks cool and collected on stage.

"I do get nervous. But I have this thing that I do before each concert. I go into the bathroom and I look in the mirror and tell myself, 'You've worked really hard to be here and with all the work you've done, you deserve to be here and you deserve to have the best time.' I've been doing this self-validation thing for about 10 years. It really works."

**Jean Bartlett ([www.bartlettbioographies.com](http://www.bartlettbioographies.com))**

**Portraits & Roots**

**A 2009 Breakfast Concert with John L. Worley Jr. (page 13)**

As our session comes to a close at Kerri's, one of the restaurant patrons notes the trumpet John has leaning in the booth and asks John if he'll play a tune. John looks around and there is encouragement from everyone. So he takes his Bach Stradivarius out of the case and says to me, "Every time when I open this case, I see an old friend."

The next thing you know "Stella By Starlight" soars through the air and makes every last member of John's breakfast audience, a community of friends. And I can't help but look at this man, John L. Worley Jr., and his instrument and think back to one of the statements he said over his morning eggs, "Music can save lives. It saved mine."

Visit John Worley's website: [www.johnworley.com](http://www.johnworley.com)

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"A 2009 Breakfast Concert with John L. Worley Jr."

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