

Finding purpose in the decrescendos: John Lambert's discovery of music journalism

A quaint home office in North Carolina is made up of a desk, a small table, and a magazine rack. One wall is filled with signed photos of music artists, and another is filled with Navy plaques and abstract paintings.

The objects on these walls sing the story of music journalist John Lambert's life.

Both of Lambert's parents were musicians who grew up in the midst of the Great Depression. His mother, a pianist, violinist, vocalist, and organist, taught Lambert that music is sheer work, while his father, a historian who always dreamed of becoming a music conductor, inspired a love for music in Lambert's own life.

At the age of 1, Lambert took up the violin, which opened the doorway of a lifelong passion. Lambert once decided that he was going to be the next big opera singer. The black and white keys of the piano added to his array of music abilities.

Lambert attended college at the University of North Carolina during the violent years of the Vietnam through a military scholarship, which required a 'normal' liberal arts degree, excluding fine arts such as music and theater. Because of these limitations, he decided to study English and history while still taking music courses and private lessons.

Immediately after Lambert graduated from UNC in 1967, he was deployed to Vietnam for five years, where he served in the Navy. Even while Lambert was immersed in conflict in the seas off of Vietnam, music still stirred in his soul.

He and two other musicians put a band together while on their Navy ship, and Lambert called this musical group 'Uncle Sugar's Canoe Club'. They played music written by Handel on Japanese tape recorders.

Lambert married the love of his life while he was in the Navy, and when he returned to the US, he and his newly wed wife returned to their home state of North Carolina.

When Lambert got out of the Navy in 1972, he realized that his time spent in the engine rooms had not done his lungs or hearing a whole lot of good, so he laid down his ambition to become a singer.

Immediately after returning from war in Vietnam, Lambert used alcohol to lessen the lingering pains of war. A new battle was beginning, and this one was inside of Lambert's own soul.

However, this setback was later seen as a setup for the career that he became dedicated to for the rest of his life.

The fight between alcohol and his family life forced Lambert to look inside of himself for a reason to be sober.

“I needed something to do to keep me from drinking at night,” Lambert said.

So, Lambert turned to a profession that required hard work from sunset to sunrise- music journalism. Lambert attended concerts in the late evening and would speed off to the offices to key in his critique story to be printed the next morning.

Lambert’s inward reflectiveness led him to a new hope in a sober lifestyle. Nearly five years after leaving the Vietnam and becoming an alcoholic, Lambert was sober.

After claiming victory over his battle with alcoholism, Lambert wrote as a freelance music critic for an arts magazine called *Rhythm*. For each concert, his pay was \$50 and two tickets to the concert.

“I could maybe hire a babysitter or go out to dinner, but nobody got rich doing this in North Carolina,” Lambert said.

When the magazine company changed ownership, Lambert got a call explaining that he and his music critiquing colleagues would be fired and replaced by a sportswriter.

In the mid 1980s, Lambert declined a job offer of a major music critic in Philadelphia he got through connections with the naval reserve.

“I really wanted to be the greatest critic in Philadelphia, but I didn’t want to ask my wife to move with me,” said Lambert.

And, becoming a small fish in a big pond is not something that sounded appealing to Lambert. He preferred staying in North Carolina, where he was content with being a big fish in a small pond.

Defeated, yet determined to continue his passion for music writing, Lambert found work that required not music critiques, but glitzy previews of concerts. This proposal was supported by Lambert and his colleagues. His passion was for analyzing conducting style and musical crescendos, not for producing flashy advertisements.

After leaving yet another music magazine, Lambert attended a concert in the glistening new performing arts center in Raleigh, North Carolina. Cornered by spectators, he was asked what he would do about the worsening lack of music coverage in North Carolina.

Lambert immediately phoned his musical mentors across the country who had online music journals, realizing that there was no online music journal for North Carolina.

On the bright and humid Independence Day of 2001, John Lambert declared himself independent from commercial newspapers and magazines and created Classical Voice North Carolina, an online music journal that focuses on theatre, jazz, visual arts, and dance.

CNVC struggled to get its feet off of the ground and was largely supported by small funds donated by friends and family of staff members. Lambert and his writing staff persevered the early days of the online journal, and today, [CNVC](#) is thriving and growing with young writers and musicians.

With more than 500 reviews per year, CVNC fills the gaps left by commercial papers as more and more of them eliminate their coverage of fine arts, according to their [website](#). The journal consists of reviews, event listings, news, and a blog, written by a variety of music critics.

Through setbacks, obstacles, and challenges, Lambert said he consistently returned to his solaces of music and writing to give him hope, purpose and drive.

“I love, cherish, and adore the written word of our language. I view music criticism as an art,” Lambert said.

Sources:

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