

# Anthony Cox, Coon Rapids High School, Class of 1973, Jazz Musician

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Like many teenagers of the 1960s, Anthony Cox was gripped by the music of the day - Jimi Hendrix, Cream, soul music from Motown and Memphis, the Beatles. Cox and like-minded high school friends would spend hours in someone's basement playing records, listening to and talking about the music. "What you don't realize is what you're doing is studying," says Cox, a jazz bassist and Coon Rapids High School graduate. "You're just amassing all this information about music." As a teen, Cox viewed jazz as his parents' music; he wasn't especially interested in it. That would quickly change.

Cox has earned an international reputation in the jazz world. His career has taken him to New York City, where he played with some of the greats of the jazz world, and with many of the scene's young talents. He has toured the world playing jazz from South America to Japan. As an older, wiser musician he returned to his hometown of Coon Rapids. Success has given him a comfortable living, but not a leisurely one. He plays in the Twin Cities on occasion. He has an adjunct teaching job at the University of Iowa, and he travels widely for recording and performing work. He also works locally in real estate, a job that is flexible enough to fit around his music demands.



Throughout his youth, Cox's parents exposed him to a variety of music, from concerts in Anoka, where he saw piano virtuoso Don Shirley, to his father's LP records of Dizzy Gillespie and Cannonball Adderley. Cox eventually became interested in jazz as an older teen. He sought out jazz on the radio like someone inside the former Soviet Union listening for news from the outside world, he explained.

He played guitar in high school, but switched to the bass after seeing composer and bassist Charles Mingus in concert, and listening to the work of bassist Stanley Clarke in the group Return to Forever. Once he picked up the bass, "then I realized I needed to study," said Cox.

His formal music training did not start until after high school, except for one class at Coon Rapids High School that Cox took at the recommendation of one of his basement friends. Bill Conrad was the school's band director at that time, and Cox took his music theory course. "[Conrad] encouraged everyone to research music and to write papers on music," said Cox. "He was open to all styles of music and that attitude has stayed with me, even as I teach."

Cox graduated from Coon Rapids High School in 1973, after attending Anoka-Hennepin Schools for his K-12 education. He started taking private lessons, then trained with a bassist from the Minnesota Orchestra and earned a scholarship to the University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire. That's where his early exposure to a wide variety of music took root and set the pattern for the rest of his life. Cox started playing in multiple classical and jazz groups, and accompanied other performers during recitals. He played with jazz groups in Twin Cities clubs while his professors urged him to go to graduate school. Cox had other plans.

In 1981, he moved to New York City, where he was able to find work quickly. He discovered that as important as New York was for jazz music, the scene was changing. Instead of being open and free-flowing, there were factions of jazz artists and styles. Musicians tended to get known for one style depending on the people they were playing with or what they had recorded. "I never quite fit in because I wanted to play with whoever I wanted to play with," he said. "My sensibility was that I wanted to experience all types of music."

Eventually, after some high-profile gigs with masters like Stan Getz, Cox finally earned recognition for his versatility. This was followed by a period of intense touring where "everything was an airport away," so Cox and his wife Barbara decided to move to the Twin Cities in 1991 and found a home in Coon Rapids. Cox never expected to live so close to where he grew up, but they liked the home they found, and after New York, Cox had enough of living in the city.

For young musicians, Cox's advice is to learn about the entire industry and to approach it with the practicality of a business person. Know how recordings are made and produced, know about publishing rights and laws, become familiar with other instruments, especially the keyboard, he said. In addition to becoming a better professional, this knowledge can be used to fall back on if things don't work out. "Even when I went to New York with dreams of making it big, I always had a Plan B in the back of my mind," he said.

Even though Cox considers himself as someone who experiments in different styles and enjoys collaboration, he described jazz as a pure art form. "It communicates so directly," he said. "When someone is creating sound, it creates an instant reaction, you either like it right away or you don't."

Editor's note: In addition to choir, band or orchestra, students interested in a music career might consider the Music/Media Technology classes at the district's Secondary Technical Education Program. These classes focus on music production and engineering. Call 763-433-4000.

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