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WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2017

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GORE-GEOUS



CAROLINE LEWIS / SPECIAL TO THE DAILY

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MAESTRO

Musician, composer and arranger Len Rhodes shares his thoughts on music from a lifetime of experience — Page 14



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SUMMIT LIFE

All roads lead back to music for Len Rhodes

From Mike Tyson to Broadway, Summit's Len Rhodes says it's all about 'the sound'

By Eli Pace
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Asked to define himself in only a few words, Len Rhodes is thoughtful but quick with his response — he's a musician, composer and arranger.

It's a fitting professional description for the 64-year-old British-born Summit County resident who has been banging out tunes on keyboards since he was 2 years old.

"Well, I don't remember much about it," Rhodes said of his introduction to the instrument, which came by way of his mother. "I just know that's where I started."

While Rhodes doesn't remember his earliest days on the piano, he does recall landing his first professional gig at age 13, getting paid to play organ at his church. Now, with decades of experience and numerous credits to his name, Rhodes' career has taken him to places that he never could have imagined when he was just getting started.

Rhodes is currently signed as a recording artist with Burning Girl Records (UK) and remains in demand as an arranger and composer. Additionally, he was recently granted worldwide arrangement rights creating a piano solo of composer Ralph Vaughn William's choral work "Reconciliation." Rhodes also recently arranged "MacArthur Park" for piano quintet in a new transcription of Jimmy Webb's popular masterpiece, according to his website.

"To be honest, I just enjoy every minute of what I do and who I am," Rhodes said Saturday as he made time for a Q&A with the Summit Daily News before a weekend

performance with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra's principal clarinetist Julianne Scott at Colorado Mountain College-Breckenridge.

Still recovering from a broken rib suffered when he slipped on some ice a little over a week ago, Rhodes was in high spirits as he spoke with a smooth accent about his career. Some of the highlights he mentioned included playing before the royal family, working on Broadway and even doing a number with former heavyweight boxing champion of the world Mike Tyson.

On Broadway, Rhodes served as music director and arranger for "A Night with Janis Joplin" in 2013. That came a year after he worked with Tyson in Las Vegas on "Mike Tyson — The Undisputed Truth."

Rhodes also currently serves as the artistic director and artist-in-residence with Summit Music and Arts, and his recordings are available through Amazon, Spotify and iTunes. His arrangements can be found on SheetMusicPlus.com and on his website, LenRhodesMusic.com.

Summit Daily News: What is it about the piano that draws you in? What makes this instrument so special?

LR: The repertoire alone speaks volumes. You think of all the great keyboard composers, as well as keyboard artists, the challenge is that after playing for all my life, there are still things I want to do.

You know, it's like, "I played that when I was 14, but I wonder how will I treat that now." I'm not the first person to look at it that way, either. (Arthur) Rubinstein relearned all his literature when he was about 60 years old because he learned it as a child and thought, "How would I play it now?"



ELI PACE / EPACE@SUMMITDAILY.COM

Pianist, composer and arranger Len Rhodes addresses the audience during a Saturday performance with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra's principal clarinetist Julianne Scott at Colorado Mountain College-Breckenridge. Rhodes received diplomas from the Royal Academy of Music and the London College of Music, with continuing studies in composition at the University of London. His career as pianist, teacher and organist has spanned more than 40 years.

I think about this often, and there's not a day when I'm not playing; there's not a day when I'm not practicing. You think about the volume of incredible music and literature, the piano is its own orchestra. You can play it like, "That's a line for a French horn, or that's a line for a cello, that's an oboe line," or

whatever it is, and yet it's all there. It's all under your hands. It's a challenge, in a way, because there's always that goal.

SDN: How is it different playing in a symphony, in a duet or solo?

LR: It's totally different. Any good accompanist isn't just doing their own thing, but

they should know what is the — whoever they're accompanying — what is the soloist doing. In the case of working with Julianne, it's, "When does she breathe? Am I going to breathe with her?" Is the phrasing, is the shape of an idea going to be consistent with the way your soloist is shaping a phrase.

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SUMMIT LIFE

So when you work with other musicians — whether it's just one person, a group or ensemble — it's all about understanding the whole picture, not just what you're playing yourself. Of course, you got to know what you're playing, but it helps if you're in tune, literally, with the other artists.

SDN: What impression do you want to leave on your audience? What do you want them to leave with after watching one of your performances?

LR: I'd rather they were listening rather than watching to be honest, but at the end of the day, it's what did the music do for them? What did the music say to them?

SDN: What kind of music do you listen to? What are your favorite genres and artists?

LR: Anything and everything. In my record library there will be (composers Claude) Debussy and (Igor) Stravinsky, The Who and Led Zeppelin. I grew up in that '60s era — you know, the British Invasion — and it was a huge influence ... so there's a huge influence

and a huge interest in my part with what the rock world was doing back then. It is just more, "What mood am I in?" than anything. There's nothing I don't like to listen to and nothing I don't appreciate all the work that goes into that.

SDN: When you're performing, what's going through your head?

LR: You're listening more than anything. You're listening for, "What is it that am I doing? What are my fellow artists doing?" At the end of the day, you just hope that your audience is listening as well, and that they get some reward from the effort you put in. If you practice every day, you're doing that for a reason.

SDN: There's a lot of fluid and emotion in a piano, but it almost seems like it can be mechanical with the precision of the notes and timing. How do you try to balance playing the piano?

LR: I wouldn't ever say it's mechanical. Maybe if you like the action, but there's so much more. (I look for) the reflection of sound, the quality of the instrument itself. As

an artist, again, you're dwelling on, "How does this sound?" It's not just about what you're doing, it's what the instrument does for you.

SDN: From one piano to another, can you describe how they play differently?

LR: There are differences in touch, in response, differences in tone, sound, the range of volume, the clarity. All the things you could think about in a good stereo system: If you listen to your favorite album on some cheesy little box, it's not going to sound quite the same as the grand stuff.

SDN: When you make a mistake, how do you handle it?

LR: If you make a mistake, you just keep going. You keep going. You try not to (mess up). That's why you practice, that's why you work, that's why you learn, but you just let it go, and you can't dwell on it.

I don't know that anyone's flawless. The artistry is to disguise it or let it go, but certainly don't dwell on it. Keep the momentum happening, keep the magic happening.



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