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# BUCKS COUNTY Courier Times

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## Entertainment & Life

Vineberg: Talking 25 years of jazz with local favorite Eric Mintel



Eric Mintel's busy year includes hosting his own show on Princeton's TV30.

To celebrate Eric Mintel's 25th year as a band leader, columnist Andy Vineberg asks him 25 random questions about his background, his music and his career.

Eric Mintel is spending 2018 celebrating his 25th year as a band leader, but this is no nostalgia tour for the area jazz favorite.

The Morrisville resident and 1985 Pennridge High School graduate is as active as ever, performing regularly with the Eric Mintel Quartet (including a show this past Friday night at the historic Bucks County Playhouse) and continuing to write and record. He's also hosting a TV show, "Talking Jazz with Eric Mintel," for Princeton's TV30 ([the first four episodes can be seen on YouTube](#)).

He plans to feature local, national and international musicians, "as well as the people behind the scenes, helping to bring jazz to the forefront."

Few people in this region have done as much to bring jazz to the forefront as Mintel, 50, and so in honor of the 25th anniversary of his first gig (Nov. 12, 1993, at Delaware Valley College), I asked the talented pianist/composer 25 random questions about his background, his outside interests and a career that has seen him perform at the White House (twice), the Kennedy Center and the United Nations.

**1. What was the first record you bought as a kid?**

"Time Out" by the Dave Brubeck Quartet.

**2. What was the first song that really grabbed you?**

Brubeck's "Blue Rondo à la Turk" (the opening track on "Time Out").

**3. What is your favorite album of all time?**

As far as a rock album, my favorite is the Moody Blues' "Days of Future Passed." As far as jazz, it's one of the more obscure Dave Brubeck albums, "Jazz Impressions of Japan."

**4. What's the first song you learned on piano?**

I taught myself "Blue Rondo à la Turk" when I was about 13.

**5. Did you ever seriously consider playing another instrument?**

Yes, guitar, but that got nowhere. I never even picked one up. It's still something I might try to figure out or fool around with one day.

**6. What's your earliest memory of performing for an audience?**

When I was very young, my dad would wake me up in the middle of the night and have me play for his friends. I might have been 8 or 9 and was already playing some piano.

**7. When did you know you wanted to do this for a living?**

The night after that first concert at Del Val College. We got a standing ovation, it was a packed house, I knew right then and there that's it, and never looked back.

**8. How and when did you fall in love with jazz?**

I had an uncle, Don Ciccone, my mom's brother, who was the bass player with Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons (in the '70s). I remember him coming to the house and playing some Dave Brubeck tunes on piano. I was probably 10 or 11 and that was really cool. The music spoke to me somehow. I fell in love with the music, and I wanted to fall in love some more.

**9. Did you have a teacher who significantly influenced your love of jazz?**

I only took piano lessons for about a year, when I was 14, to get the basics. I was coming to lessons playing obscure, difficult Dave Brubeck music, and he's trying to teach me "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star." He couldn't teach me anymore, he said to go your own way. But I at least got the basics down.

**10. Who are the people you've been most excited to meet in your career?**

I met Dave Brubeck in 1990 at the Keswick, that was so much fun. I met Marian McPartland when I was a guest on her jazz program on NPR. During a session at Tony Bennett's son's studio, his son called me and said, "Can I bump your session back a couple of hours, there's another group," and I said, "Wouldn't it be funny if Tony Bennett was there before us," and sure enough, it was him. Oh, and I met Lou Ferrigno at a ComicCon in Philly with my daughter. I was dressed as Superman. I said, "I always wanted to meet you, but not like this."

**11. If you could have any person on your TV show, who would it be?**

I would love to have Kenny Barron, the great jazz pianist. And I'd love to have Cornel West, he's a great speaker.

**12. If you could go back and perform alongside a dead musician, who would it be?**

John Coltrane would be cool. Dave Brubeck, too. I had a chance to open for him at the Kimmel (in 2005) and was blown away watching his group.

**13. Do you ever get nervous before a performance?**

Not any more. I used to, years ago. Now, it's more excitement than nerves. I'm excited to share the music with the people.

**14. If you didn't make music for a living, what would you be doing?**

I'd be a documentary filmmaker.

**15. Tell us something most people don't know about you.**

I exercise and go to the gym every day. I'm a Yamaha-endorsed artist. I book all my own gigs. I'm the proud father of a daughter, Tess, 15.

**16-18. Tell us something most people don't know about each member of the quartet.**

(Bassist) Jack (Hegy) toured and performed with Steve Lawrence and Eydie Gorme, he was the bass player in Don Rickles' band.

(Drummer) Dave (Mohn) was the drummer for the popular dance band Johnny's Dance Band (in the '70s) and also recorded for Polydor Records.

(Saxophonist) Nelson (Hill) studied at the Eastman School of Music and right out of college went on the road with the great Maynard Ferguson for three years.

**19. Does the band have any weird rituals before shows?**

We do. I'm one of the comedians of the band, and I'm always making funny behind-the-scenes videos in the dressing room. Funny, quirky stuff, but very family-friendly. Whenever we're on the road, we've always got something.

**20.** Do you have a second-favorite genre?

Classical piano. Bach, Beethoven, Chopin. Jazz has some definite classical influences.

**21.** What's the best concert you ever attended?

Dave Brubeck in 1995, with (long-time) members of his quartet, Joe Morello and Jack Six.

**22.** If your music could somehow be added to the soundtrack of a movie, what would it be?

This will probably sound corny, but I'm thinking "It's a Wonderful Life." That's a feel-good movie, and that's what I hope to do with my music.

**23.** What's your favorite thing to eat before or after a performance?

I'm a pretty health-conscious guy, so grilled chicken or a Caesar salad.

**24.** What's your favorite non-musical hobby or interest?

Making fun, spooky paranormal videos. I did a video for Visit Bucks County that's got over 30,000 views.

**25.** The best thing about jazz is ...

How it reaches people of all ages, religions and backgrounds and has the ability to move people.