

# JAZZ FOR PEACE

PIANIST  
RICK  
DELLARATTA  
SHARES  
HIS STORY

*(From an interview with Nate Haney  
and Saphir Lewis, May 29, 2008)*

"With Jazz, I had the opportunity to travel all over the world and share my music. I found that people all over the world were every bit as humane as the people I knew, in many instances more so; and that music was a way of breaking down boundaries that societies had put on us, that kept us back from creating a thread of common ground.

As problems escalated in the world, I ended up saying things at dinner parties that would kind of surprise people. One thing I once said at a dinner party was that Palestinians, Israelis and Americans are often together in my apartment playing Jazz just for the fun of it, and sometimes on stage.

People would say to me "That's so strange because we're under the impression that even the leaders of these countries can't get in the same room together." So I decided I wanted to start something called "Jazz for Peace" that went to areas of conflict and showed what I had been seeing anyway: how we can cross cultural barriers and get together not only in a positive way, but in a profoundly positive way. It's such a positive result that comes through musical communication between people of different languages, different cultures, different religions. Once you have that common ground, you now have so much of a better chance at coming to an understanding, even if it's an agreement to disagree.

Of course, nobody was really interested. Basically, people listened and thought it was a great idea and that was about it.



Shortly after 9-11, I started to get calls from all over the world. I didn't realize how many people I had told the story to. People were saying, "I remember this day in (whether it was Tokyo or Hong Kong or Saul Paulo, Brazil or La Paz, Bolivia)....where you told me this story." Most people had thought it was just a fun conversation, but they remembered what I said, and when I got all these calls, I realized this needed to be done, period.

In other words, it was time for me, even though there wasn't funding, even though there wasn't support, even though there wasn't anything, it was time for me to put achievement before profit.



# JAZZ FOR PEACE

***We started a benefit concert series that has now led to over 500 concerts that help people that have dreams that are under promoted and under funded.***

At that time, there just happened to be an extraordinarily prestigious concert coming up. I was a headliner at the Savannah [Georgia] Jazz Festival, and I had written a poem called Jazz for Peace. There were about 8000 people at this festival, and I read the poem. People were very moved by it.

I had another concert following it, in upstate New York, and again, it was a very prestigious concert. It was with a multicultural band, with a saxophone player who was brought over by Dizzie Gillespie and Jimmy Carter from Cuba, and a South American bassist, and an American drummer. They were all very big names. We were all going to perform together, and I started to get calls – “We heard about the poem you read called Jazz for Peace, is there any chance you’re going to have it set to music?”

Someone had called from the press to write about this concert, and asked me about it, and I recited it over the phone. They had a tape recorder on and they recorded the whole conversation. All these things came out in that article that I had never put down on paper. I had never thought about or summarized it. But here it was in an article because it had just come out of me and a tape recorder was on. I had a Jazz for Peace poem, and the statements that I was making were really what Jazz for Peace is all about. That became known as the first Jazz for Peace concert.

From there I asked my manager to contact the United Nations and to tell them that I wanted to do a concert uniting Israelis, Palestinians and Americans. She said “Well, who do I call?” And I said, “I don’t know, just start with the main number.” She looked at me really funny and said “OK”.

Every now and then I’d get a little update when she’d tell me what was going on. At the time, very few of my concerts were in the United States, and I mean almost nothing. I’d been to Japan six times. I’d been to Europe probably 15 times. I’d been to Hong Kong twice, I’d been to La Paz Bolivia, Brazil, Iceland, but I’d never been to a lot of cities in the United States.

One day my manager was giving me a briefing, saying “Well, the Luxembourg event came through, the one event in France came through, but the second event is cancelled...but this other thing came through in Milan, Italy, you’ll have a day off here, but we don’t know what to do with it. Oh, and by the way, the United Nations called and they do want to do the concert, with the Palestinians and the Israelis. And then she went on to something else, “Then you have a New York event...” I said, “What?, What did you say?” She said, “The

United Nations wants to do the concert.” I said, “Do you realize what you just told me? This is a big thing!”

So, I did the concert at which the press did not show up at all, and people were there and they said “This is an unbelievable thing you’re doing for World Peace”. And I said, “If it’s so great then where’s the press?” They said, “You see that bleacher over there where those people are sitting? If we had a bomb blow up there, the press would be all over your concert.”

And that is the truth.

Anyway, the concert happened, and people started finding out about it, even though there was no press, no article, nothing. We started doing Jazz for Peace concerts in New York and ended up starting a benefit concert series. We thought “We’ll help out a few little charities here in New York, because we have a regular place where we are playing.” It was actually in the basement of a youth hostel.

***That’s what our theme is – identify someone who is trying to help people and help them.***

We thought, “We’ll help out about 6 non-profit organizations” We figured there must be at least 40 or 50 total in New York... we’d help out 6 of them. We’ll help out about one third of all the people that need help in New York, we were thinking. Little did we know, there were tens of thousands! Just in New York City! And the thing is, here is the world crumbling every day, worse – worse – worse – worse – and I’m finding out it’s not because there isn’t anybody that wants to save the world, there’s actually tons of people that want to, that have organizations. We were in shock! Our volunteers are coming up to us to say, “Well Rick, you want me to choose three organizations for you to help? There’s 35 thousand! How are we going to choose three?”

We realized that there are thousands of non-profit organizations, people with dreams that are trying to do nothing but help straighten these problems out all over the country, all over the world. What is going on here? These people are not being promoted, they’re not being funded – people in their own cities don’t know, even their neighbors don’t know what they’re doing.

After a couple of the little benefits, we get a call, “Is this Jazz for Peace?”, yes....”This is the office of presidential candidate, Dennis Kucinich, and we just want to inform you that Mr. Kucinich will be attending one of your concerts.” And I’m thinking, “Does he know that it’s in a youth hostel, in a basement, that the toilet doesn’t even work?” But sure enough, he showed up! And the funny thing was, when he showed up, some students had removed the sound system for a disco party on the roof, not knowing what was going on, and I had to run down to



my apartment and grab some things, run through traffic and come back....Mr. Kucinich was addressing the audience without a microphone, he was just talking to the people about how great Jazz is, and how it unites people...and just when we got him a microphone, he finished his speech.

These kinds of things led me to believe that this is something that has to be, period. Whatever time we wasted on this planet, let's not waste any more.

We started a benefit concert series that has now led to over 500 concerts that help people that have dreams that are under promoted and under funded. We get publicity for them, and we raise funds for them, we get contributions and we've gotten letters or checks or both. People like Senator John McCain, and Mayor Bloomberg in New York.

Right now, you're seeing the spectacular destruction of an unsustainable path, and upping the anti and upping the anti to keep that unsustainability going. The solution to all of our problems is really simple; it's the transition that's so difficult, and the inability of people to make that transition quickly. That's where these organizations come into play, because all of them are in one way or another there to help people make a transition from being a part of the problem to being a part of the solution.

There are literally thousands of them - I'm never going to be able to support them all in my lifetime. We're going to need another hundred more Jazz for Peace concerts to even make a dent. So we're just at the very beginning stages of a spectacularly sustainable path in the midst of an unsustainable path that needs to be reversed not today, but yesterday.

After we did the benefit concert series, we started an education series to bring Jazz back into the schools, music back into the schools. Jazz is coming into many of these schools for the very first time. We also have a musical instrument donation program, which donates instruments to underprivileged children. We've donated hundreds of instruments.

Through all these things we've got something that we feel is helping those who are helping others, and that's what our theme is - identify someone who is trying to help people and help them. People who are helping others are not being helped, if anything it's the opposite. We have people who are helping others who are hurting. If you're trying to help others, the more help you need, the less you're able to help.

I'm on my fifth or sixth event with some of these organizations. I've done two concerts for an Indian tribe in Las Cruces NM, and during the time that I've been working with them, they've gone from number 9 on the list they were on for 15 years, where they couldn't budge, to number two, and now they are at number one - the list is to get their acknowledgement from the US government. This acknowledgement will enable them to begin

the process of reclaiming land that was taken away from them, setting up schools, getting tribal members who are still alive, reuniting the tribe, rejuvenating the culture, all the things that need to be done. We'll be doing our third event for them later this year, for others we're on our 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> event. We've done 5 for an organization in China that is providing tuition in the countryside for women to go to school for the first time. None of the women go to school, they get no education whatsoever. Only boys go to school in these towns, and that's maybe - no women. Over and over again, once we plant a seed, we don't know where it's going to grow.

On our website we have hundreds of letters from organizations writing about how our concert had an impact on them. We've had organizations tell us that because of something that came out in the paper, or TV or radio, people called that wanted to be contributors, sponsors, etc.

One time we had a little concert for an organization. Someone at that concert knew Magic Johnson, and he said "You should do something with Magic Johnson - let me call and see if I can get this for you." Next thing you know there's a big Jazz for Peace event at Magic Johnson Theater. The thing just blew up, it was \$500 per ticket, Patty LaBelle was there. I saw the chairman of the NBA, and there were basketball players there. They were just people in the audience. We raised crazy amounts of money. But it was the synergy of getting the little event off the ground. Who knows? It's just a seed, I don't know if it's going to be a dandelion or a beanstalk, but it's going to be something good. That we do know.

The bottom line is that I learned through studying history, that the art form of jazz, the music I'm playing, has had a history of having a profoundly positive effect on people. There's a man named Charles Black. He was a person, like most Americans growing up in his era, which was the 1930s, 40s and 50s - he was a racist by default - meaning he was a perfectly ok, normal guy. But he was a racist because that's what you were when you grew up in certain areas of our country. You can be a perfectly nice guy, but after you've gotten all those cultural and subliminal messages in society, you've got a racist point of view and you don't even know it's racist, you just think it's normal.

### ***This is an atomic bomb of beauty and wonderment.***

He went to a dance, in the Midwest somewhere. Instead of dancing with girls he started watching the musicians. One musician in particular, was a guy playing trumpet on the bandstand at the event. Charles had come to the conclusion that that person was a genius. The person he saw happened to be Louis Armstrong.



# JAZZ FOR PEACE

After he left the dance, he was still stuck with that belief. And he was stuck with a huge problem. He believed that he just saw a genius play and that genius is black. Black people couldn't even vote in his town. So it called up a lot of questions. Now he's faced with one problem after another. If a black person can be a genius how come this, how come that? His life was changed in a profoundly positive way.

When you look at what he did - he went to school, not to see how much money he could make, but to become involved in civil rights. He started doing things for achievement. Charles Black is the author of 'Brown vs. the Board of Education', as well as almost every civil rights bill. He was a US Senator and he's had tremendous influence. He was asked once what was the turning point in his life and he said "It was Jazz."

I for one believe that what we need in the world is a thousand Jazz for Peaces. We're partnering with everyone that needs it. We are a bank for any individual saying I want to be part of a Jazz for Peace event. Right now we can reproduce a Jazz for Peace event at any time, all anyone has to do is call our office. It's not a loan, we give out grants.

The bank comes from our donors. Go to the website to see the people who have sponsored us from Senator John McCain to Mayor Blumberg. With everyone from Dennis Kucinich to Noam Chomsky in the middle. You'd never get these people together in one room but they all are supporting Jazz for Peace. So if a musician wants to do what we're doing, we will fund it. This is an atomic bomb of beauty and wonderment.

I'll give you another example. We had a woman call us once who said my mother died of breast cancer some years ago. She was aided by a breast cancer society who worked with

her. So we put on an event for her, so that she could raise funds for the breast cancer society in honor of her mother. That took place in Oyster Bay Long Island.

We've just started our international benefit series, taking the concerts all over the world. We've been to Mexico, we've been to Canada, and we were just in Copenhagen, Denmark. It's growing exponentially, but it has to grow by tenfold before we even get to half of one percent of the need.

I'm looking for the person that has a dream, that wants to achieve and achievement comes first. It's a bizarre myth, people have it backwards. When you have a person with a dream who says "Well, as soon as the kids are in college, as soon as I pay off the vacation, it's always "as soon as". It could be anything; they're constantly putting their dreams off. The sooner you get on the right path, that's the key.

What I want is to help people get started on that right path. That's why I'm saying that I don't have a problem that we can't handle everybody calling us. When we get to that problem, I'll be glad to cross that bridge. Right now I have no need to cross it, anybody who calls us (or is chosen by our volunteers) that has a truly outstanding cause that is under funded and under publicized- we are putting on an event to help them.

