

Joey Pearlman (1996-2021)

eulogy by Mark Stefaniw

Giant Steps

Hello dear friends and family of Joey Pearlman. My name is Mark Stefaniw, and I was Joey's classical bass teacher when he was in high school. I'd like to share with you *my* telling of Joey's story. But first, there is this tune, an iconic jazz standard, called "Giant Steps", written in 1959 by saxophonist John Coltrane. It has become the most revered, and feared tunes by jazz musicians because of the way it abruptly changes keys, some 10 times, every 2 bars AND at a blistering tempo of 200 beats per minute. For the bass player especially, this tune represents the coming together of two extremes: astronomical understanding of music theory and the physical ability to walk bass lines at sheer tempo for the duration of the tune. I tell you all this for two reasons: #1) Knowing Joey, he would have eagerly pursued, and mastered this tune while he was in the New York city jazz scene. And #2) I want to use the the name of this tune, "Giant Steps", metaphorically, to describe Joey's time with me.

When Joey was in 9th grade, he was playing the electric bass, and had just started fiddling around with the double bass. As for me, I had just started my teaching studio three years earlier, and was making house calls all over town. One day out of the blue, I get a call from Joey's mom, Betty, looking for double bass lessons for her son. She told me a seemingly impossible story, that Joey wanted to take a few bass lessons and audition to get into the Denver School of the Arts orchestra program on a short four week deadline. This was to become the first of Joey's many Giant Steps that I witnessed. Although, Joey practiced hard that month, and played the required audition materials well enough, he decided to stay at East High School. This turned out to be a good decision, since he would be working with East's most venerable of music teachers, Mr. Keith Oxman, with whose guidance Joey developed his love for jazz music.

After that DSA audition experience I was surprised that Joey would continue studying classical bass technique with me throughout his high school years. Joey developed technique on the double bass at an astonishing rate. He became dedicated to this instrument like no other student I had seen before; perhaps even more dedicated to the bass than even myself! It became clear

to me that Joey was something special, and as a bass teacher he would be a once-in-a-lifetime experience for me. Joey breezed through Bach minuets and the Capuzzi concerto - Giant Steps. I tried to slow him down with advanced etudes and scale work. And then came the Dragonetti concerto, and more Giant Steps. As a sophomore, Joey won the principal bass chairs for both Denver City-wide Honor orchestra and jazz band. Later that spring, Joey won 4th chair, Colorado All-state Honor Orchestra and Western States Honor Orchestra – all Giant Steps. That same year, Joey concurrently started taking jazz bass lessons with the notable Denver jazz bassist Kenny Walker, and joined the Colorado Conservatory for Jazz Arts – again, Giant Steps. Later that same year I helped Joey upgrade to his first master-level double bass – another Giant Step.

Joey's junior year was huge. While in my studio he tore through the 1st Bach cello suite prelude and dove into the various solo repertoire of Bottesini – Giant Steps. As I struggled to keep up with Joey, it became clear to me that our student-teacher relationship would change into a mentorship – a Giant Step for us both. Joey auditioned successfully into the Denver Young Artists Orchestra (DYAO) – a Giant Step. Several months later, and amongst a field of ferocious violin competitors, Joey beautifully played the Bottesini 2nd bass concerto in the annual DYAO concerto competition. But the proverbial “violin cards” were stacked against him. All the same – 'twas another Giant Step for Joey. Anticipating that he actually would *win* that competition, Joey committed the *entire* Bottesini concerto to memory, but sadly never had the chance to perform it for a concert audience. However, as luck would have it, I managed to capture, on video, an astonishing performance rehearsal of Joey's, with his piano accompanist, in a tiny practice room at Denver University, with Betty sitting at Joey's side trying hard not to be a distraction. This one amazing performance video of the entire concerto, all from memory, for an audience of one, will be cherished forever – Giant Steps. As if the aforementioned workload wasn't enough, Joey earned his level-9 certification from the American String Teacher's Association yearly exams; AND he became the first young artist intern with the Denver Philharmonic Orchestra, thus becoming my stand partner in the bass section. Like a proud father that concert season, I rotated Joey around my bass section to give my section mates a chance to share a stand with him. Indeed, Joey's junior year was chock full of unimaginable Giant Steps.

As a senior, Joey decided to "retire" from city and state honor orchestras in order to focus on jazz. Studying with Kenny Walker, Joey gunned for, and won, the coveted single jazz bass chair in the Colorado All-State jazz band – a big Giant Step. Joey also took on a second year as young artist intern in my bass section with the Denver Philharmonic - Giant Steps. During this final year I assisted Joey in preparing for college classical auditions, and as you all know, Joey attended The New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music in New York City's Greenwich Village – big Giant Steps.

Apart from Joey's dedication to the bass, he was the kindest, and most respectful student any teacher could hope for. Always attentive, soft-spoken, focused, and malleable -- absorbing every nuance of my coaching. Now, every time I hear the tune "Giant Steps", I will think of Joey.

Joey Pearlman, I want you to know that you were a once-in-a-lifetime Giant Step in my life, and I'm sure gonna miss you! (place copy of "Giant Steps" chart in Joey's coffin).

As a final tribute to Joey, I have prepared a special arrangement of the Bach Minuet in G, that I call "Bach Minuet for Joey", and as a special gift to the Pearlman family, I will play this now on Joey's bass.