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D.B. Lenz's music can be heard on countless TV shows

BY ELLEN S. WILKOWE • STAFF WRITER • JUNE 14, 2009

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D.B. Lenz's MySpace page says it all: "Plays well with others."

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The jazz guitarist's most recent "others" include a top-shelf lineup to the tune of bassist Will Lee (David Letterman's "The Late Show"), Joel Rosenblatt (drums) and Nick Rolfe (keys), who perform on his latest album, "Hit it and Quit."

"I didn't even know them before," he said during a phone interview. "I met them for the first time at the studio."

"Hit it and Quit" hit the streets Wednesday at a CD release party at the Iridium Jazz Club in New York City. Lenz, 37, sets apart this album from his previous six by the who's and what's that have come into play.

"These are top guys of New York playing on it, and it was recorded in a top-notch studio in New York," he said. "I have a horn section and also a solo guitar piece ('Truth is Temple')."

The title track reflects "funk verve and swagger, something James Brown would do or say," he said. The first track, "H-Town," — you guessed it — pays homage to his current residence, Hackettstown, where the music happens. (In addition to a shout out to Hackettstown, "H-town" lends itself to Lenz' first attempt at arranging and featuring a horn section.)

With "H-Town" as his home base, this self-made musician may have traveled the world in the name of jazz but identifies moreso with jazz fusion, "jazz-improv mixed with other styles of music like rock and funk," he said. No stranger to media sound bites, Lenz's songs have landed on more than 90 TV shows on MTV, VH1, USA, A&E, Comedy

Central, Nickelodeon, Travel Channel, Food Network, Spike TV and more.

When this happens, Lenz is usually the last to know.

"Maybe my wife will catch it on VH1, but usually I don't know until I get a statement six months later," he said. In helping build a name for himself, Lenz went directly through companies that specialize in placing independent music on TV and films. "It's all about do-it-yourself," he said. "You can play and write, but you have to learn the business side."

Six albums. TV exposure. A 2008 Rising Star Award for Best Jazz Band from Gigmasters. United States and European tours — with another planned for this fall. How did this self-proclaimed "North Jersey Boy," hailing from West Milford and now Hackettstown, journey into jazz?

"When I was in fifth grade, I played the saxophone," he said. "But in high school I picked up the guitar."



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B.D. Lenz, a Hackettstown-based jazz musician, has just released "Hit it and Quit." The title track reflects "funk verve and swagger, something James Brown would do or say," he said.

(PHOTO BY DARBE ROTACH)

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According to his mother, it was the organ that proved instrumental in shaping his musical [career](#).

"When he was 5 or 6, we got an organ and he could already listen to a tune, pick out the melody and play it," said Carol Lenz of Lake Hiawatha. "He was a drum major in the marching band and also voted most musical in high school."

In navigating a [career path](#) somewhere between a pilot or musician, Lenz opted for strings over wings, but took flight as a rising jazz musician instead. "There are similarities between both," he said.

Lenz attended the Musicians Institute in Hollywood and continued to further his studies under the tutelage of Grammy-nominated guitarist Mike Stern (Blood, Sweat and Tears, Miles Davis, etc.) guitarist and educator Vic Juris and pianist Charlie Banacos.

"He got discipline at the music institute," Carol Lenz said. "He grew up a lot."

In furthering his [education](#) outside the music realm and to the delight of his parents, Lenz attended the [College](#) of New Jersey, where he earned a degree in math education.

"We encouraged him to do something else besides music, but there's a relationship between math and music," Carol Lenz said.

To date, B.D. — as in Bernard Davidson — Lenz uses both degrees and works as a math teacher at Lenape Valley High School.

"College was just an excuse to spend time practicing the guitar," he said. "I'd play up to eight hours a day."

Long-time friend and fan, Joe Naida of Succasunna, could attest to that.

"We'd all be going out, and he'd say, 'no I have to practice first,' and he'd play for hours," he said. "He still does. He's a perpetual student."

At the College of New Jersey — then Trenton State — Lenz befriended who would become his core band members, people he just "fell into," Lenz said.

"I never really intended to do jazz but we couldn't write songs or sing," he said. "But I'm not strictly jazz. I've been a sideman for rock and pop gigs. I love the variety." (His regular lineup includes, but is not limited to, James Rosocha on bass, Geoff Mattoon on sax and Tom Cottone on drums.)

In 1997, he released his first album, "Tell the World," followed by "Lost and Found" in 1999. Somewhere between "Lost and Found" and "Simple Life" (2003), he landed on the Apria label.

"Years ago, the founder had an online CD store and I sent him my independent releases," he said, referring to his first self-produced albums. "It's so hard to find labels for up-and-coming unknowns, and I consider myself very lucky," he said.

In a reverse trend of having songs on hand for an album, Lenz was instead approached by Apria to produce songs on the spot for the "Hit It and Quit" release.

"It happened really fast," he said. "It was a challenge and inspiration, and I went full-force for three months." As self-composed composer, Lenz writes his own material and sends charts and demos for the other musicians appearing on his album.

"It just gives them a ballpark as to what I'm thinking, and then they can make it much cooler," he said. That is exactly what unfolded during the recording sessions of "Hit it and Quit."

"They were so gracious and totally professional," he said.

In deconstructing musician stereotypes, Lenz is quick to own up to a guitar collection maxed out at 12, as opposed to a million.

When he's not composing or practicing, he is using his other [degree](#) as a math teacher at Lenape Valley High School or spending time with his wife Mary Beth and children, Julia, 9, and Evan 6.

"My kids? They think I'm famous because I'm in newspapers and magazines," he said. "But this is all they know."

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