



## **Jazz artist Jay Vonada and his quartet get set to release a CD with many moods and grooves**

by Hinaa Noor, Town&Gown

At the age of 12, when many kids are focused on video games, Jay Vonada started to learn to play his dad's trombone, which his father used to play in the Legion band in Aaronsburg back in the 1950s.

"My brother, who plays trumpet, started teaching me on the trombone and then I was introduced to Roger Boop, who was a teacher in the Penns Valley Area School District," says Vonada, a jazz artist and composer who is now a well-known trombonist in central Pennsylvania. Vonada, who is from Aaronsburg, graduated from Penns Valley in 1993.

His music teachers, also including Dr. Jack Miller, Susan Butt, the retired choir director at Penns Valley, and Evelyn Mugridge, helped foster his love of music.

"I would like to thank all my teachers in high school for their love of music and sharing and teaching that love to me," Vonada says.

It wasn't until his sophomore year at Mansfield University, when Vonada took a jazz improvisation class taught by Dr. Michael Galloway, that he got the "jazz bug," and he has had it ever since.

"I don't remember the tune, but it was from the album Eminent J.J. Johnson Vol. 1, and of course the trombonist was the legendary J.J. Johnson. There was something about his sound and soul that just hit me, and I wanted to play like that – and I am still trying to get on his level," Vonada says.

Vonada says he continued to study many jazz musicians of all instruments by listening to their music and practicing his craft in ensembles at Mansfield. However, he left there in 1997 without a degree and moved back home. He started as a full-time musician in 2009 at the age of 34 when he was laid off from Gettig Engineering and Manufacturing Co., and he hasn't looked back since.

“Music has been a part of my life ever since I can remember and after I got laid off, it made sense to give it a try full-time and it has worked out great,” he says.

Now, Vonada is set to release his sixth CD in July. He made this one, *United*, with his jazz quartet.

The quartet started a year ago with the idea of a recording project. In addition to Vonada on trombone, the quartet includes Kirk Reese on piano, Bob Hart on bass, and Kevin Lowe on drums. They had one rehearsal and three concerts before they went into the studio to record *United* on July 17, 2017, at Red Rock Recording in Saylorsburg with Kent Heckman as recording engineer.

“I’ve known and played with the guys in different ensembles, whether it be my duo swing-nova with Kirk on piano or Bob on either upright bass or guitar. I have known Kevin the longest as he is an original founding member of my group, Organ Trio West,” Vonada says.

For Vonada, the most memorable event with them was as guest artists at the Mansfield University Jazz Festival in April 2017.

“Being hired to perform at the university where it all started and getting to share that with these guys was amazing,” he says. Seeing his trombone professor after the gig and getting his seal of approval was very rewarding professionally, Vonada says.

Vonada has released five CDs independently:

*Jammin’* (2008), *Red Pajamas* (2011), *Groovin’It* (2012), *Chemistry* (2014), and *Expressions* (2015). This new CD is different because a record label, Summit Records, based in Tempe, Arizona, is releasing it.

“For this new CD, I think people will enjoy the musicianship both individually and collectively of all the guys,” Vonada says. “We don’t get to play together as a unit too often, but when we do it is pure joy and creativity. This CD has many different moods and grooves that I think many people will enjoy.”

The release is set for July 20, the night the quartet will perform at The State Theatre in a concert that will feature the tunes on the CD and some more originals and standards.

Playing in concert is nothing new for Vonada, who mostly performs in central Pennsylvania, but has had gigs in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Maryland. He plays at a wide range of venues, including restaurants, breweries, wineries, and festivals, but also at nursing homes and assisted and independent living communities, where audiences particularly enjoy the standards from the 1920s through ’60s.

Vonada has written more than 125 songs, and four have made the semi-finals of the International Songwriting Competition.

“I love what I do. It has its challenges just like any other job,” he says. “I am my own secretary, agent, promoter, web designer; in other words my 9:00-5:00 pm is all the “other stuff.”

What’s next?

“Continuing the journey of playing this wonderful music,” he says.

To learn more, visit [jayvonada.net](http://jayvonada.net).