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The Jazz Condition -- UPI Arts & Entertainment  
By KEN FRANCKLING

Five years ago, **Anton Schwartz** set aside his doctoral dissertation research in the field of Artificial Intelligence to pursue a stronger muse. The Harvard and Stanford-educated jazz composer and saxophonist hasn't looked back in regret.

Now based in Oakland, Calif., Schwartz, 32, leads his own group and has worked as a sideman with other Bay Area talents, including singer Kitty Margolis and flugelhorn player Dmitri Matheny. He is just out with his second self-produced CD, "The Slow Lane," on the AntonJazz label. It's hard not to consider the title of the recording a metaphor for his abrupt career change. It wasn't the inspiration for the song, but Schwartz agrees that the phrase fits like a glove. Schwartz began playing saxophone at age 14 in his native Manhattan, where as a high school student he formed a group with two other young talents who have since made solid names for themselves in jazz: pianist Larry Goldings and guitarist Peter Bernstein.

While earning a B.A. in mathematics and philosophy, magna cum laude, at Harvard, this Phi Beta Kappa student was also holding down the first tenor chair in the Harvard Jazz Band.

Graduating two years before another famous Harvard Jazz Band alumnus, Joshua Redman, Schwartz went to Stanford on a National Science Foundation fellowship. He earned his master's degree, pursued his doctorate and played first tenor in Stanford's jazz band.

The music won.

"I reached the burnout point," Schwartz said. "I had to take time off and do some thinking. I had cleared out everything from my life to concentrate on my dissertation. Then I had a total block. I decided the one thing I would never regret spending my time at was music. Inherently, any time I spend doing music I would consider time well spent."

Prior to that change in direction, Schwartz said, his goal was to work in a think tank, such as Bell Labs or the Palo Alto Research Center. "It never occurred to me that I could do anything directly useful -- other than come up with hare-brained ideas to problems a bit removed from current technology. I was getting a lot of creative enjoyment out of the work I was doing but was not a complete enough mathematician to do it with fluency. "Now, it is wonderful. I can play a gig,

go to bed afterward and don't have to worry that someone is going to disprove my solo the next day," Schwartz says.

His new recording features the same band as his 1998 debut, "When Music Calls." Those solid Bay Area players are pianist Paul Nagel, bassist John Shifflett and drummer Jason Lewis.

"The big surprise to me on my first disk was how content I was with the composition. I will always rip apart my playing," Schwartz says. "You hear all the things you'd like to do differently, but I felt remarkably content with the writing. It changed my feeling of myself as a musician. "The Slow Lane" reveals his strong writing skills and a confident, melodic sound on the tenor sax. He can burn but prefers a more moderate tempo. "This new album focuses more on the resolve in playing, making each note speak, somehow contribute. It is about spaciousness in playing. Wayne Shorter was an absolute master of that," says Schwartz. "I want to give the listener an appreciation of the spaciousness of the music. A lot of players don't take the time. I didn't go to music school, so I don't have the killer chops that most of my colleagues do. I rely a lot more on melody and the shape of what I am playing." Shorter is one of his musical heroes, so it is fitting that "The Slow Lane" opens with a gorgeous cover of Shorter's gorgeous tune "Miyako." Another gorgeous tune on the session is a Schwartz original called "Peace Dollar." It was inspired by another influence, the pianist Abdullah Ibrahim, formerly known as Dollar Brand, whose music imparts a strong spiritual feeling.

The title tune is all Schwartz, a spirited ballad that is wistful, soulful and spacious from start to finish.

Schwartz has been his own man since choosing jazz as his career path, but he now says it often is difficult doubling as his own manager, publicist and promoter.

"I like the total editorial control and the ability to just make decisions, and it is neat to put money behind something you feel very strongly about," Schwartz says. "But I could play three times as many gigs if I wasn't my own booker and road manager. It is a Catch 22. I need to clear up more space in my life for the music itself."

(For more information on Schwartz's recordings, see [www.antonjazz.com](http://www.antonjazz.com))



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