

# The Louisville Cardinal

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## Spreading his love of jazz around the globe

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When Michael Tracy was a teenager, he wanted to be a lawyer. "I was intrigued by the show Perry Mason," said Tracy. So when his father was called for jury duty, Tracy went with him. "It was boring, dry. There was nothing happening, so I said 'forget this.'"

Leaving his dream of becoming a lawyer behind him, Tracy set out to find what he wanted to do with his life.

"I liked playing music and I liked interacting with people in that fashion," said Tracy.

Being a saxophone player who had been participating in All-State Band since the eighth grade, he decided that he wanted to look into music as a career. Tracy obtained his bachelor's degrees in both music and music education and a Master of Arts degree in higher education from the University of Louisville.

Today, he is a professor of music and jazz at the U of L School of Music where he teaches saxophone and acts as the Director of the School of Music's Jamey Aebersold Jazz Studies Program. "He single-handedly created and grew the jazz program at the School of Music to what it is today," said John LaBarbera, a professor of music at the U of L School of Music. "... an internationally recognized jazz program,"

"I like playing a role in guiding [students]," said Tracy. "You really learn on your own. I can't teach them, they have to teach themselves to learn." "My role, I think, is to give them guidance on the best way to achieve what they want to achieve."

According to his students, Tracy's honesty is one part of him that is appreciated. "Mike is an amazing teacher, not only because he makes you think," said Graeme Gardiner, a freshman jazz studies major with a focus in saxophone, "but because he really is not afraid to tell you how it is." "[He] has always let me know where I am, whether good or bad, and I've always really appreciated that."

Besides teaching at U of L, Tracy spends a lot of time abroad performing and working with students in other countries. In fact, Tracy has visited about 40 countries performing and teaching. The experience he has obtained with jazz overseas continues to be helpful to his students. "He has so



much experience and has had so much involvement in today's jazz world," said Gardiner. "The knowledge I have available to me through him is immeasurable."

A project Tracy had been involved with while working overseas was helping to establish a jazz studies program at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre in Estonia. The country borders the Baltic Sea and lies northwest of Russia. Being granted a Fulbright award, Tracy was able to spend some time in Estonia helping to develop the program, especially helping to develop the Academy's library. Prior to the development of the jazz studies program, the library had no CDs or jazz material. "Its tradition was definitely classical, and they wanted to embrace the West more," said Tracy.

When he is not teaching, Tracy often performs around the world in places such as Argentina, Brazil and Italy, as well as locally, where he can be seen at the Galt House almost every Friday evening. During his down time, Tracy enjoys photography, reading and spending time with his 14-year-old twins. "That's my real job," Tracy said. "I enjoy watching them grow up and seeing how they both interpret things."

Tracy feels there is more to being an instructor than just teaching the music. "I feel like most of my job is almost like a psychiatrist where you're using music as a vehicle for the individual to find out who they are."