

Pressy Strikes Chord with Wrigley Tradition

By Paul Ladewski

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How did your career evolve?

My grandfather was a violinist, so we have music in our family. As the story goes, I hummed songs when I was 2 years old. I started to play the organ when I was 5 and took private lessons for so many years. And I loved baseball from the time that I was very young. The two got into me. I couldn't hit a fastball, so if I was to be involved in baseball, I knew that I had to do something else. (Laughs.) So why not be an organist?



When did you get your break?

In 1986, I had the opportunity to fill in at Wrigley Field for a few games. One year later, they looked for a permanent replacement. I got the job on April Fool's Day.

Which organists have had the greatest impressions on you?

I enjoyed Nancy Faust when she played for White Sox. She's at the top of the list. There's Ernie Hays, who I listened to on St. Louis Blues games. Vince Lasheid of the Pittsburgh Pirates and Penguins . . . Then there's the traditional organist such as John Kiley, who played for the Boston Bruins, Celtics and Red Sox.

Other than the obvious, what does it take to be an effective ballpark organist?

You have to know the game. Before it starts, I have a montage of music that I'll play. But during the game, a lot of what I do is spontaneous. When something happens on the field, you can't be sifting through music sheets. You have to anticipate the situation. You also have to read the crowd. For example, in the bottom of ninth, it's time to crank it up. Get 'em going and keep 'em going. It's like what you do, except I try to tell a story on the organ.

What's the greatest challenge?

Sometimes you have long rain delays and, well, you're there to entertain the fans. Like Jack Brickhouse would say, whether there's 1,000 people or 40,000 people in the stands, you've got to give it your all. Because for some of those thousand people, it may be their first game.

What are your favorite theme songs for players?

For Ryne Sandburg, I would play the theme from the Greatest American Hero, and he certainly was that. For Mark Grace, I would play Amazing Grace, obviously, but I also did Taking Care of Business because he was in the movie. He would look up and tip his hat while he warmed up. That was cool. I played Dixie

for Jody Davis, and he would put his hand over his heart. That was pretty cool, too.

Do you take requests from fans or players?

The players keep to themselves when it comes to that. Especially at the Cubs Convention, fans will come up to me and say, “Why don't you do this?” or “Have you thought about that?” One guy said, “For (Darwin) Barney, you can play Barney the Dinosaur's I Love You song,” I said, “Thank you very much, but I don't think that will work.” (Laughs.) So I play the theme from either the Flintstones or the Andy Griffith Show instead.

What is it about baseball that makes it better suited for organ music than other sports?

Baseball has a more casual atmosphere. It's not a rock concert. People like to converse there, so louder isn't necessarily better. We had a good indication of this a few years ago. Some players wanted their own pre-recorded songs, but the majority of Wrigley Field fans did not like it. That speaks volumes in itself. That's one of the things that makes Wrigley Field a special place.

Is it time for others to follow suit?

Some of the newer ballparks took things from the older ones, but a lot of them play the same type of music. About half of them have organists still. Let's bring the sound back to the rest of them, too.

(Editor's note: Pressy is a southwest Chicago native and currently resides in Palos Hills, Ill.)