



### Herb Silverstein

Music has always been an important part of Herb Silverstein's life. The world-renowned ear surgeon grew up in Philadelphia studying classical piano. As a teenager, he discovered modern jazz — Stan Getz, Gerry Mulligan, Charlie Parker — and pursued it over his parents' objections. In college, he played drums in a foursome and took jazz piano lessons.

While in medical school, he had to make a decision whether to become a doctor or a musician. It was the early 1960s, when jazz was on a downswing in this country, and most of the great players had departed for Europe. Silverstein opted for a medical career.

When jazz revitalized in the early 1980s, Silverstein's children, who knew of his passion, told him to listen to Herbie Hancock and Chic Corea. It reignited his love for jazz piano. Since then, he has been taking piano lessons from a variety of instructors. He currently has a weekly session via telephone with a teacher in Jacksonville.

Along the way, Silverstein has collaborated with his teachers on jazz CDs to benefit the Ear Research Foundation he founded. He sends the CDs to colleagues and friends and asks them to contribute, if they feel so inclined.

His most fruitful partnership has been with Richard Drexler, a gifted bass player who lives in St. Petersburg. Silverstein had been writing a song a year, and had only a handful of original tunes. When he suggested collaborating on a CD, Drexler agreed, but insisted that he write 10 new songs. Silverstein told him he didn't know if he could do that, so Drexler showed him how.

Silverstein has been using his friend's method ever since. He decides on a rhythm — Bossa Nova, a fast tune, a ballad, a Latin number — and thinks of a song he likes in that genre. Then he takes the chord changes in the piece and develops new melodies for them. "By the time I'm done messing around with it, changing it around, you'd never know the song I started with," he explains. "It is an entirely different song."

It helps that jazz is an improvisational medium. Silverstein plays around on the piano until he finds something he likes, perhaps a fragment or a few notes that work together. From there he develops a new melody. Then he uses Band-in-a-Box, a computer software program, to write out what he's playing in lead sheets for the different instruments of his jazz group.

Using this process, Silverstein has written more than 37 songs and put out two CDs of his original compositions. He and Drexler have also collaborated on a book, "Jazz Harmony & Improvisation," that features their work.

Many of his tunes are for special occasions. Silverstein wrote "High-Heeled Lady" and "French Wedding" when his son got married in Paris. "All of the songs have a little story behind them," he says, "so when I play them, they have meaning for me."

He likes to have fun with the titles. While recording a number outdoors, he and Drexler noticed that a lot of lizards seemed to be watching. At the end, they realized that the most "attentive" one wasn't moving because it was dead. So they called the song "Dead Lizard Blues."

Silverstein has become known among his colleagues for his music, and is often asked to play at medical conventions. He also feels that it has made him more relatable with his patients, more than just a surgeon treating their problems. If they like jazz, he gives them one of his CDs after examining them. "A lot of them give more money for the CD than for the medical treatment," he says with a laugh.

He is already at work on his 10th CD. "Each one gets better, and my playing keeps improving," he says. "It's great fun."

**Reflected glory:** Mirrored in the sheen of Herb Silverstein's piano is his wife, Beth.