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Modern classical pianist Francesco Tristano at Cliff Bell's | Marvin Shaouni

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Hertz So Good: Detroit Music Awards' Top Dog Talks About the City and the Scene

By: Jennifer Andrews



April 14, 2009



If Howard Hertz hands you a mixed tape, be prepared to rock the freak out.

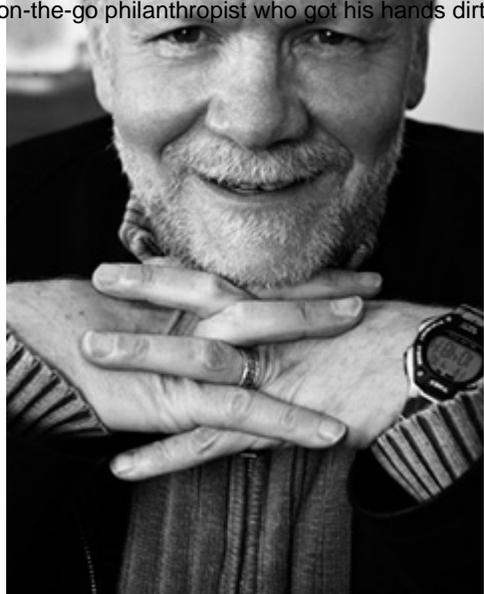
Hertz is a big-shot [entertainment lawyer](#)

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who's repped the likes of Eminem, George Clinton, and The Romantics. He's an always-on-the-go philanthropist who got his hands dirty in Lansing helping the film industry in Michigan take off. And, he's president of the [Detroit Music Awards](#) -- which just happens to be celebrating its 18th year this week.



Model D sat down with Hertz over a few cafe au laits to chat about his part in the upcoming Detroit Music Awards and his own, personal Detroit music story. We even managed to get the DL about some new talent on his client roster that he's super geeked about -- and you Detroiters might be, too.

Q: Obviously, you travel a lot. What's your story when people ask you, 'Why Detroit?'

A: It's actually more the people from Detroit that say, 'Why Detroit?' as opposed to people in other cities. People in other cities go, 'Detroit? Oh, what great music.'

And then we talk about projects I've worked on through the years and what my connection is to the music in Detroit.

I first actually realized the fervor for Detroit music when I was 20 and traveled through Europe and North Africa by motorcycle. In London in the '70s, everything was Motown and everyone was talking about how great it was. More recently, I go to MIDEM ([Le Marché Internationale de la Musique](#)) in southern France every year. And the first year, it was the same thing. Everyone was so excited I was from Detroit and wanted to talk about Detroit Music.

Q: What other stuff were people asking?

A: You know everything from back in the day and John Lee Hooker and how things developed in Detroit ... and about Motown and whether any of the former Motown artists were still doing some new music. Or if I had any music available ... It confirmed to me that Detroit has amazing music, which I already knew, but there was also the realization that people in other parts of the world know it almost better. And, that Detroiters are complacent about it.

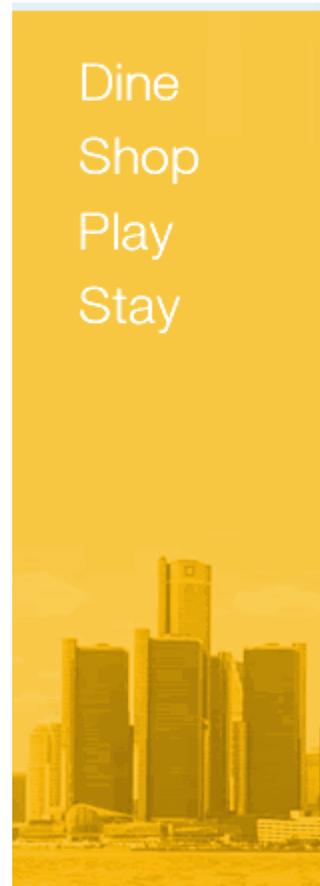
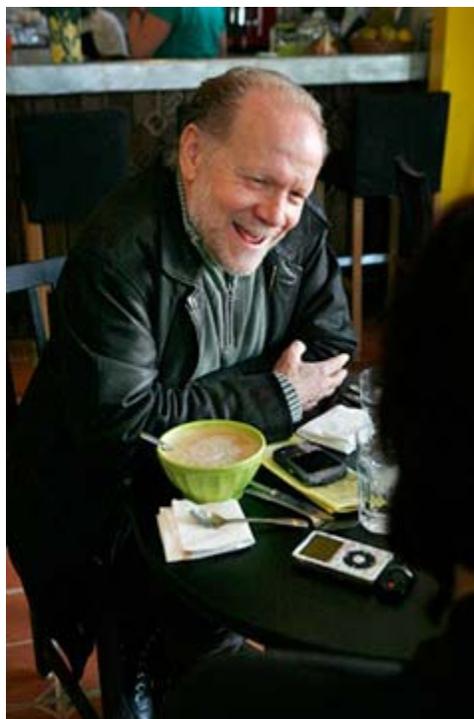
You know, it's like, 'You don't know what you've got 'til it's gone.'

What makes the music here so great, do you think? Is it the water?

A: I think it's the work ethic. I think that it's the kids that grew up with their parents working in the factory and doing what they had to do to make a living. It transformed into: If you're in a band, you've gotta give it your all. You've gotta work on your craft.

You know, people that were staying here, if they wanted to have a creative outlet, as opposed to maybe going to work at an ad agency or something, they would start a band. Or start to write music. Or become a singer-songwriter. ... It's a way of expressing themselves, maybe be discovered, and becoming a part of the music history of Detroit.

Q: So that's why you got involved with the DMAs?



I wasn't involved in the DMA's right at the beginning ... I met Gary Graff in Hamtramck at the Motor in like '96 or '97 and he asked if I'd be on the board of directors. After that, I sort of got the awards in my blood, and for better or for worse, I've been president ever since.

Q: What's your favorite part about the show?

A: The diversity of the talent. It's not just a rock show or just jazz or country. We try and mix it up every year. We can't have every genre every year, but we try to have at least one or more well-known act along with new, up-and-coming acts from the area in different genres. I think that's just a great tribute to the music coming out of Detroit.

Q: Is there someone you're really excited about to see this year?

A: What do you think? (He laughs.) The [Amboy Dukes](#) are doing a reunion on Friday night that will be great. They haven't performed together in over 30 years. So that'll be exciting. And another one is D-PAN. It's the [Deaf Performing Artists Network](#), a nonprofit that lets the deaf community really become part of the music community ... and currently there's a U of M student contest going on for a device that could be either rented or maybe given for use at concerts where a deaf person could put it on and would then be hooked into the sound system of the artist so they would actually feel the music.



Q: That's might be a good segue into technology and social media. How is that changing the music industry?

A: There's good and bad. The upside of it is that artists are able to get their music out to the public without necessarily having a record label ... The downside, of course, is that the free downloading has

taken a huge toll on the industry as a whole ... I'm firmly of the belief that the artist should be able to make the choice. If they wanna give it away for free, they can give it away. If they wanna charge for it, they should be able to.

But under the current state of affairs, there aren't a lot of choices ... So it's a difficult situation. I'm not in favor of suing every college student or Girl Scout troop for using music ... But I really feel strongly that the attitude that music is "free" is the wrong attitude.

Q: We know you have to push off to a lunch meeting you're really excited about. Can you talk about it?

A: Real quick, sure. This great kid [Mike Posner](#) originally from Southfield. He's a sort of young, hip Justin Timberlake-ish talent who puts a humorous twist on singing with hip-hop artists (watch a clip [here](#)). Check out his music on MySpace or with [Big Sean](#) on the WSU Campus this week.

Jennifer Andrews is a freelance writer who lives in Midtown Detroit.

The Detroit Music Awards will be held on April 17 at the Fillmore Detroit. Tickets are still available at the Fillmore box office or through [Live Nation](#).

Photos:

All photos of Howard Hertz taken at Le Petite Zinc Cafe' in Corktown

The Fillmore Marquee - courtesy photo Dane Gussin

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