

All eyes on: Eric Patterson

BY KATE LINMAN
Staff Reporter

Chemistry professor by day, actor and rocker by night, Eric Patterson enjoys a combination of creativity and logic in his life.

Teaching chemistry at Truman State is Patterson's passion — but he also enjoys exploring the arts, which he does through theatrical performances and involvement in rock bands.

"I don't want to do chemistry all day," Patterson said. "I love teaching, but having an outlet, a creative outlet, is really important to me."

Patterson said he started theater and piano lessons during elementary school. He has continued in both areas throughout his life.

Patterson said he got involved with the theater department performances during his undergraduate work during the late 80s and 90s at Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas. Patterson said he participated in four mainstage productions during college, and he was the first chemistry major to be in a mainstage production there.

He took a break from performing during graduate school because of time constraints, he said, but he joined the Kirksville theatre scene a year and a half ago. Since fall 2010, Patterson has performed in three productions with Curtain Call Theater Company, a Kirksville community theater company. Last November, Patterson was named to the Curtain Call Board of Directors.

"I love acting," Patterson said. "There is something about being able to be another person for a little while."

Music is another of Patterson's passions. He started playing the piano during elementary school, and played the trombone during middle school and high school, he said. It wasn't until college that he picked up a guitar. Patterson said it's every male's dream to be in a band, a dream that presented itself when he started working at Truman.

Patterson said that during 2002, a student of his was in a band with other students and when one of the band members left the group, Patterson agreed to join. The group, called Elefance, was composed of Patterson and four Truman students. Since then, he has been a part of two other bands, including the one he currently plays in: Twisted Knickers.

Brie Vuagniaux, Truman alumna and Twisted Knickers band member, said they like to write songs with raw lyrics and that Patterson has written a song called "Cut Me Loose." The band has performed twice since forming.

Vuagniaux said Patterson is a very energetic performer and really contributes to their performances.

"[Patterson] screams a lot, jumps around and plays really hard on his guitar," Vuagniaux said.

Although Vuagniaux said it makes no difference that he is a professor because she has always known him as "Talia's boyfriend," she thinks it's great he can be a teacher and be part of a scene that brings something to the community and students.

Patterson equates being on stage to his role as a professor. He said the students are like his audience, and if he isn't entertaining, he won't

be quite able to connect with his audience.

Patterson said he encourages his students to come to his performances, but only a handful of students have attended. He said he likes having his students see him perform, but thinks it might be strange for them to see their professor performing on stage or in a punk band.

Senior Rachel Witts, a student and advisee of Patterson's, saw him perform in Curtain Call's "Wait Until Dark" last semester.

"At first, it was kind of odd because I kept thinking of him as a professor, but he did a really good job, so it was kind of easy to see him as the character rather than the person that teaches me," Witts said.

Patterson said he hopes that students take a similar approach as him with exploring both the scientific and humanistic communities. He said he hopes that science majors find a creative outlet and humanities majors become curious about science.

"Truman is a liberal arts school, so one of the things that I hope our graduates learn along the way is an appreciation of what the other side of campus does," Patterson said. "I'm a firm believer in learning about everything that is interesting."



Rose Sparks/Index

Chemistry professor Eric Patterson plays his guitar Monday in his office. In addition to his passion for teaching chemistry, Patterson enjoys participating in community theatre productions and local rock bands. Below, Patterson teaches chemistry lab Tuesday.



Jazz musician visits campus

BY JENNIFER MARKS
Staff Reporter

Big time jazz is coming to Kirksville.

For the 44th Annual Upsilon Phi Jazz Festival from Feb. 24-25, Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia is bringing in famous trumpeter John McNeil from Brooklyn, N.Y. Tim AuBuchon, Truman State jazz studies director, said McNeil will share his love of jazz by both performing with and instructing Truman State students.

An accomplished performer, recording artist and composer, McNeil said he began playing the trumpet during 1958 when he was 10 years old in his hometown of Yreka, Calif. McNeil said he largely was self-taught for the first few years, learning to play by listening to special ordered records of Miles Davis and John Coltrane from the local record store.

"I couldn't actually read music in the beginning," McNeil said.

McNeil said he learned to read music so he could join his junior high school band. He said he was afraid there would be symbols he wouldn't know at first.

He played his first gig just shy of his 16th birthday, McNeil said. He said it was the most fun he'd had in his entire life and couldn't believe he was paid for it.

"I was hooked," McNeil said. "Up until that time, I was going to be a chemist."

After graduating from high school, McNeil said he received a recruitment letter from IBM offering to pay for his college if he agreed to work for them as an intern during the summers. He had to choose between college paid-in-full or pursuing his love of jazz. He said he went to his father expecting him to recommend taking the IBM contract, but instead his father simply asked him what he wanted to do with his life. He told his father he



Submitted photo

Jazz musician John McNeil plays trumpet in Denver, Co. on Nov. 5, 2010. McNeil will perform at Truman State as a part of Phi Mu Alpha's Jazz Festival on Feb. 24-25.

wanted to be a jazz musician.

"[My father] said, 'Well, that's what you should do then,' no question in his mind," McNeil said.

McNeil moved to New York during 1974 to play professionally.

"I remember the first time I flew in and got out of the cab in Manhattan," he said. "I looked around and I had this weird feeling like I'd come home."

McNeil lives in Brooklyn, where he practices several hours a day and

plays gigs and jam sessions year-round. Some weeks McNeil said his schedule demanding multiple performances and other weeks there are none. The Wednesday night jam sessions he co-runs with his friend, trombonist Mike Fahie, in Brooklyn are known internationally for their high caliber players, McNeil said.

"[New York] is the best place to be if you want to play because there are more ideas per square inch in this town than any place else in the

world," he said.

McNeil said the number of excellent musicians in the city has skyrocketed since he arrived. He said you could create multiple bands out of only the best players for each instrument.

McNeil said there are players who constantly try to recapture the jazz heyday.

"People always talk about the Golden Age of Jazz being way in the past," McNeil said. "That's not true.

The Golden Age is right now."

AuBuchon said, in addition to being a guest performer at this year's Jazz Fest, McNeil will work with jazz students at the university. AuBuchon said McNeil will instruct clinics, play with one of the student jazz combos and perform with the big bands at the concert 8 p.m. Saturday in Baldwin Auditorium. AuBuchon said he will accompany McNeil on the tenor saxophone with bassist Bill McKemy and drummer Brian Steever Feb. 24th at DuKum Inn.

After meeting McNeil during 2000 while teaching at Benedictine University in a Chicago suburb, AuBuchon said McNeil was at the top of the list for this year's Jazz Fest. AuBuchon describes McNeil's playing as lyrical and reminiscent of Miles Davis's and Chet Baker's relaxed style.

"He's also pretty quirky," AuBuchon said. "He may be a little more on the subtle end, but I think he's a very deep musical player."

Freshman Joel Gordon is a music major who will work with McNeil while he is here. Gordon was recently named the State Winner at the College Woodwind Competition of the Missouri Music Teachers Association. He said he's looking forward to playing with McNeil because a lot of guest artists brought to Truman do not write and perform their music.

"He is a composer just as much as he is a musician," Gordon said. "We're playing three of his compositions, which isn't always something we do."

McNeil said he has a piece of advice for aspiring musicians from his mentor Clark Terry, who played with Duke Ellington and The Tonight Show band.

"There's never any shortage of people that are going to tell you what you can't do," McNeil said. "Your job is not to listen."