

TAB

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He's driven to music and medicine

By Ed Symkus
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It was never a matter of having to choose between careers for Stanley Sagov. The South African native knew at a very early age that he had two major interests, and he was going to go after both of them.

"From the time I was about 6, I knew I wanted to be a doctor," says Sagov, who has a family medical practice in Arlington, and serves as chief of the Division of Family Medicine at Mt. Auburn Hospital. "I'd had a lot of surgeries as a child, and doctors were kind to me. And science was always interesting to me."

Sagov also started playing violin when he was 6, and he was immediately grabbed by the power and beauty of music, eventually learning to play ukulele, electric guitar, recorder, oboe and piano, and switching from straightforward classical music to playing in a rock band and eventually falling under the spell of jazz.

Sagov, sticking with the piano, performs two sets at the Regattabar in Cambridge on March 4 with his group the Remembering the Future Jazz Band.

Sitting in his Chestnut Hill home that's filled with books and CDs and comfy chairs and keyboards — I counted six pianos, including the electrics — Sagov, 64, chats about playing guitar and piano in South Africa, about working with his current bandmates,

about deciding not to go out on the road with his music, and about another of his loves: cooking.

But he first wants to clarify his position on medicine and music. He recalls his days at medical school in



Capetown, and says, "I found that when there were periods of very intense medical study and apprenticeship, I would need to balance it with playing hard, as well."

Then he adds, "I'm still passionate about both things."

Sagov traces the beginnings of his serious approach toward music to the time he was playing electric guitar in a South African cover band called the High Five Plus two. At the same time, he was hanging out with some jazz players who sort of adopted him into their circle.

"I learned piano just by playing it," he says of his time with the jazz crowd. "I had a natural facility for the piano, without really knowing what I was doing. I was just listening and imitating. And I found myself more and more drawn to the piano and into the jazz thing."

With hopes of being equally successful in music and medicine, Sagov came to America upon completing his studies at Capetown Medical School and, after living in New York for a while, moved to Boston to study oboe and jazz piano at New England Conservatory.

Right after graduation, he was getting gigs left and right.

"We played opposite Gary Burton and Oscar Peterson and Dave Brubeck," he recalls. "We played

Lennie's on the Turnpike, the Jazz Workshop, Paul's Mall. I was offered \$400,000 a year for the band, which sounded like a lot of money, but everything had to come out of it — travel, wages, recording. And if you wanted to keep a band together, you had to travel all the time. And I just couldn't do that."

But he did meet lots of musicians, many of whom he still plays with, four of whom — bassist John Lockwood, drummer Bob Moses, saxophonist Stan Strickland, and trumpeter Mike Peipman — will be onstage at the Regattabar gig.

"I've played with John for about 40 years," says Sagov. "And I've played with Bob and Stan and Mike since the '70s. The chemistry between us is my vision of heaven on Earth. There's a spirit of mutuality and serious fun, of being in the moment and representing close listening and responsiveness."

On the night of the gig, Sagov will bring a list of songs the band knows well, and will call out which ones to play according to his own gut feeling.

"As a band we like to keep surprising ourselves," he explains. "We have three new albums coming out, and we'll probably only play things from the most recent, which we recorded a few weeks ago. That's why I call the band Remembering the Future. It's like as soon as we've played something, it's the past, and we're on to the next place."

Upstairs in his home studio, crammed with keyboards, wires, equalizers and speakers, Sagov listens to a playback of some of those new songs — his eyes are closed and he's shaking his head and nodding to the beat.

But then he's back to talking about the upcoming shows, and that they're different from most in that they involve food.

"I've been cooking since I was a boy," he says. "I'm a very functional cook. My wife is an artist and illustrator and writer, and she's ambitious but she's very impractical. So when it comes to getting things together at the same time — so you can eat with everything hot — that's not for her. But I can just come home and put something together, never look

at a recipe. I don't do anything ambitious, I just put things in, and some of the time it comes out good."

His specialty is curry, and the Regattabar show is subtitled "South African Jazz Curry."

"I grew up eating curry as a kid," says Sagov, who has developed a couple of detailed recipes for vegetarian and meat curry.

"I sent the recipes to the chef at Henrietta's Table," he says of the restaurant that, along with the Regattabar, is in the Charles Hotel. "So people will be able to have some curry before the shows."

Stanley Sagov and the Remembering the Future Band are at the Regattabar in Cambridge on March 4 at 7:30 and 10 p.m. Tickets are \$20. Call 617-395-7757. For dinner reservations at Henrietta's, call 617-661-5005.