MY EDIT:

Stanley Sagov is a dazzling jazz pianist and composer, equally proficient on a number of other musical instruments as well as surgical instruments, as evidenced by his simultaneous full time career as a medical doctor.

He never fails to amaze his colleagues in the music and medical fields with his ability to lead such an intense dual life as a physician as well as a musician.

Dr. Sagov is releasing yet another CD from his home studio where he produces enough music to fill a full disc practically every month. He is also a top notch photographer shooting nature, people and places with the eyes of an unusually sensitive personality.

Born in 1944, in Cape Town, South Africa, to a Jewish family who had immigrated there to escape the chaos and anti-Semitism that followed the Russian Revolution, the young Sagov grew up in the midst of the horrid South African regime of Apartheid and its resulting police state.

Born with Gordon's Syndrome, an extremely rare genetic disorder which can cause club feet, cleft palate, dysplasia of the hip and thumb-in-palm deformity, he suffered greatly during his first 13 years, as he was forced to endure sixteen different abnormality-correcting surgeries in London, New York and Boston.

At school he was stigmatized and teased by other boys because of his awkward gait and the leg irons he had to wear for many years. At an early age, this extraordinary strain triggered a sudden insight in him.

“This was not my fault,” says Sagov, “Suddenly there was a realization about this, around age 9. I remember walking uphill from a violin lesson one day and understanding the parallel between my being stigmatized for looking unusual and the terrible way that black people in South Africa were being treated by whites. How could others think that this was something that I had willed or caused and for which I should be blamed? It is a genetic disease affecting both my daughters and my granddaughter.”

“No one in my family played music professionally, though my mother dabbled in it a bit, but when I was age six I suddenly asked to play the violin. I have no idea why I did this! I was a bad but enthusiastic violinist. I remember wearing a British school uniform with a dark jacket and gray pants in the winter, and riding on the top level of the English style double-decker buses with my quarter-sized violin. I had leg irons on because of the multiple surgeries, and I must have been a strange sight.”

“I always felt a kinship with the black people of my country. The Passover story with its themes of being strangers in a strange land and needing to be freed from slavery and

oppression, and the cruelty and mass murder of my fellow Jews and family members in anti-semitic Europe resonated with my perceptions of the unjust society in which I was living. All white people in South Africa had servants. Even if you were extremely poor and on welfare, you had servants. Our servants would carry me around and take care of me, and I sensed a kind of nobility about the Bantu people in Cape Town. They had a lot of pride. In
the 50's there were so many more black people than white. The ratio was about 4 to 1."

Cape Town was the legislative capital and in those days there were only three white members of parliament who strenuously opposed the ruling nationalist party. One of them came to stay with the Sagov family during the 6 month legislative session every year, and had a great impact on young Stanley.

His name was Leo Lovell and he played ukulele, which he soon taught Stanley how to play. This led to his purchasing a guitar on the way to England for another surgery.

"I was immobilized for a long time in England and there was a blues revival happening there, even before it really took hold in America. I was listening to folks like John Henry, Leadbelly and Big Bill Broonzy. I was crazy for Lonnie Donegan. Soon I was hooked on the guitar and was playing homage to the Chicago blues men and

English skiffle music. When I went back to South Africa, I brought this music with me."

"Back in Cape Town I remember auditioning for a band and I was wearing studs on my jeans. They liked me, so I began playing with this very popular group called the High Five Plus Two. We played Fats Domino tunes, Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis titles, and stuff by Buddy Holly and the father of rock & roll, Chuck Berry."

"In a local band competition, an R&B band led by a guy named Morris Goldberg who played reeds, won. Later Goldberg went on to play with Hugh Masakela and on the Graceland album tour with Paul Simon. So, when our band's piano player got sick, I picked up the piano and learned how to play those hip R&B licks in our band."

"My sister liked jazz, and my parents were listening to Django Reinhardt, Duke Ellington, Lionel Hampton and Glenn Miller, so I was exposed to lots of jazz at home as well as to the music of the African penny whistles on the street. I heard the exciting music of the Black Township, this was Mbakanqga and Kwela music."

At age 16, Sagov met a jazz bass player, a romantic charismatic character by the name of George Kussel, who led him fully into the jazz world.

“The jazz scene in South Africa was strikingly integrated and different from the rest of life there. It was a life of beat philosophy, drugs like marijuana, sex and jazz (naturally we also never inhaled!) This amazing music represented the fusion of European and Black cultures. This was an unusual niche in the apartheid society in which blacks and whites could reach out to one another. It was multicultural SOUL. It wasn’t about ‘it’s a black thing and you wouldn’t understand it.’’

The jazz scene was always integrated in South Africa. It was a statement that said ‘we aren’t a part of this Apartheid thing.’ There was sex across the color bar, and clubs that were openly integrated, even in the face of it being totally illegal. Part of why it was sanctioned however, is because the government was also using these jazz clubs as locations where they could spy on people, as many in attendance were real radicals and revolutionaries.”

“The music was great. Stan Getz, Bud Shank and John Mehegan came and toured. This was the 50’s and early 60’s. They told us that we were creating the only jazz outside America that was REALLY jazz. Many of the elements of race, social protest, suffering and pressing through racism were the same as they had been in America. Grass-roots political resistance efforts were happening at that time, and people were coming together around those themes as artists.”

“Dollar Brand (Abdullah Ibrahim), Chris McGregor, Kippie Moeketsi, Dennis Mpali, Dudu Pukwana, Todd Matshikisa, Early Mbuzi, Martin Mgajima, Winston Manququo, Johnny Gertse, Monty Weber, Chris Schilder, Midge Pike, Cecil Barnard (Hotep), Basil Moses, Hugh Masekela and Miriam Makeba were some of my heroes at that time. I got to play with all of these amazing people and they would come and visit at my home as well. I always had sessions going on with jazz people. This was striking because it had such a social, spiritual and integrationist agenda around the music.”

“I saw jazz as an oasis. Dollar Brand was such a brilliant player and actor. There was this amazing club called the Vortex, owned by an Indonesian guy with incredible dope and good food, and the music there was always very, very powerful. Sometimes Dollar would be playing, and there was so much black humor in the society there… There was a deep feeling of implacable forces of oppression on one level, but we were young and simply into the music. Our mix of African and American jazz elements had the power behind it and Dollar would perform satirical guerrilla theater, skits, poetry and always his deeply soulful and swinging music.”

“These years as a teenager were wild years for me. I had a fling with an Indian woman, which was totally illegal. One day, when my parents were away in Europe, my sister and

I had one of our open jam sessions. By morning the house was filled with musicians sleeping everywhere, and I was in bed with Aisha. Then my aunt showed up unexpectedly, checked all this out, phoned my parents and the next thing I knew, my sister and I had to live with my aunt till my parents returned!"

One night a wild jazz guy named Bob Tizard, who played bass and trombone, decided I needed to learn how to play "Perdido", and so we stayed up all night playing in a trio with Don Stegman on drums, from 1 am to 7 am until I finally got it and could keep track of the 32 bar song form with cyclical changes and improvise on something other than the blues."

While all this jazz life was going on, the young Stanley Sagov was also heavily influenced by medicine, having been in and out of hospitals for most of his life with many surgical procedures to correct his club feet. Throughout high school he played music, but he was equally drawn to science.
He was rebellious but still received high grades. There was never any pressure from his family to become a physician, but because he'd experienced so many surgeries, he had met a lot of MDs and was drawn to the profession. At age 13, he went to England for several operations, and met a great Harley Street surgeon known as Dennis Browne, who headed up very formal tours of the hospital dressed in striped pants and tails. A famous

orthopedist who was subsequently Knighted by the Queen for his work, Dennis Browne took a liking to the young Stanley.

All through medical school, Sir Dennis wrote him and asked him to study and come work with him in London. Stanley was also inspired by several uncles who were prominent physicians in Cape Town and greatly influenced his choice of a medical career.

Sagov had also developed a deep understanding of how Apartheid was so oppressive to people of color, and how that affected the death rate in rural areas of South Africa. In those days, in rural areas, 50% of black children perished by the age of five. One's life expectancy was essentially plotted against the color of one's skin, and even by the depth of the pigment. As a doctor, Stanley could see how unfair the society was, simply based on medical outcomes. Because he wanted to make a difference, in 1962, Stanley decided he would attend the University of Cape Town to study medicine.

"At this time I was still playing in clubs and had moved from guitar to piano. Just before going to the University, I had the feeling that I really wanted to know more about harmony and counterpoint. The Juritz family had moved in next door, and the husband was a professor of physics who also played first rate bassoon and harpsichord with the Cape Town Symphony."

“We became amazing friends. Here I was, a seventeen year old Jewish boy hanging out with a patrician musician named John Juritz. We had a great affinity, and he taught me recorder and introduced me to my first oboe teacher. We formed a group that played baroque chamber music. I learned a lot about classical music from this saturation experience, and played oboe in an orchestra and opera company at the University of Cape Town. He was a very important part of my musical career. Even as I was studying medical journals, I also read through every page of Grove’s Dictionary of Music. I wanted to learn everything about the subject and I was all over the map musically, all the while studying medicine to the hilt as well.”

“I wanted the music, but at the same time I wanted to have a good impact on people who had such terrible medical care in the black townships outside of Cape Town. As a trainee, I became skilled at re-hydrating scores of patients in our well equipped hospital. They’d walk in looking like death, and leave looking pretty well, but then they might die a week later from something as simple as chicken pox or measles or gastroenteritis. I could take care of black people, but black medical students were not allowed to see white patients. That was how insane the conditions were, there and then, for medical students and doctors.”

“In the black townships, there was an amazing music scene. Though black people were not considered citizens in South Africa, they were given 13% of the land, usually the least arable land, and they were only allowed to be in South Africa as workers. The townships were essentially ghetto compounds with thousands of segregated people living just 12 to 15 miles out of town, and all of them either walking or taking buses to work in the city every day. In order to go into a township, you had to have papers and report to the police to tell them where you were going and why. I went every week to perform with the musicians and never reported to anyone, but I never felt afraid. I knew that my black friends would always take care of me. It was such a police state. I’d go every week, perform in concerts and then take musicians home in my car. Sometimes there would be riots in the township, but they’d put me behind a piano and protect me.”

“I worked in the townships as a doctor as well. As a senior med student, I always had the need to do medicine AND music. I always gave equal time to music as I did to medicine. It took a lot of energy, but I had a real NEED to do, and have, both in my life. I was always totally prepared every day for school, and I never crammed. I was a disciplined student by day, but also a mad man at night! We had block parties with music playing all the time, and we’d even bring in huge grape trees and have these Bacchanalian orgies! Once, we got arrested and I was

taken before the university council. The university issued a public edict that I was not allowed to go to parties!"

"There was this element of desperate gaiety and the flouting of authority in my life, but I was always a diligent medical student."

"I got into the jazz scene in Johannesburg as well, through a connection with South African born pianist Chris McGregor who had been playing in a band for the show, "Sponono." This show followed the groundbreaking jazz opera King Kong, the story of an African boxer who was a tragic hero, and it also spawned a lot of other musicals. Miriam Makeba was in King Kong. Chris also recorded a very important big band album at the area's Castle Lager sponsored jazz festival. It mixed jazz with Black Township music and documented our unique South African synthesis of the tradition. I had the heady privilege of playing with many of the musicians who were part of this era, and this ushered me further into the African jazz experience."

"The music was a hot heady mixture, and some rich white people who'd be, in a certain way, slumming by inviting us over to their very courtly upper crust houses, enjoyed it, and blacks and whites would play together. This was totally illegal. Sometimes I'd sleep over in Soweto, which was also illegal, but I always felt protected by my relationship with the musicians and the spirit of the music."

“In 1967, I went to London and there, through my London family, I met Cleo Laine and John Dankworth, two of the big jazz stars of that time. Cleo told me to look up jazz singer Sheila Jordan when I got to New York, and after three weeks of phone tag, I finally got lucky. She took me under her wing and introduced me to all the jazz greats of the era, including Ornette Coleman, George Russell, Jaki Byard, Elvin Jones, Roland Kirk, Jimmy Garrison, Charles Moffet, Ted Curson, Howard McGhee, Booker Ervin, Billy Hart and so many others… I had moved to New York after having taken the medical exams in South Africa, and immediately went to work at Bellevue Hospital, Grasslands Hospital and New York Hospital. And all the while, I was playing at night in clubs like Slugs and the Village Vanguard, The Village Gate, Pooky’s Pub and Musart, with many of my newly found jazz friends that Sheila had introduced me to. Some of the people who saw me at the clubs ended up in my care at Bellevue, and they wondered if I really knew what I was doing, as they’d seen me as a jazz musician the night before!”

“The music was inspiring me so much and I knew that I wanted to learn still more, especially about jazz. Around that time I heard that Gunther Schuller was starting a jazz division at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, so I applied to the school and, after two auditions and letters of recommendation from Bill Evans and Ted Curson, I was accepted in the jazz department. I moved to

Boston and was surprised to find out that, although I was a jazz piano major, they had no piano teacher for me! I protested and when they asked who I would like to have, I suggested some of the great players I'd heard in New York, like Bill Evans, Oscar Peterson, Hank Jones, Roland Hanna, John Lewis or Jaki Byard."

"Gunther said 'OK, we'll get one of those people for you.' In the meantime, I studied with classical piano teachers who taught me the correct fingering and hand positions that I'd never learned. I practiced carefully for three months, then the school flew me to New York weekly to study with the great Jaki Byard. After a few weeks other students heard about this, so the school decided to fly Jaki to Boston on a weekly basis to teach several students at NEC."

"During my time at NEC, I was also holding down positions as a physician at Harvard University Health Services, the student medical center at MIT, and I was even the prison physician at Walpole Prison. I also moonlighted at various emergency rooms and in intensive care units. Again, I always needed to balance the rigors of medicine with those of music. I had a wife and family at this time as well."

"I put together a band called "Sagov" which featured trumpeter Stanton Davis and drummer Anton Fig, both classmates at NEC at the time. We opened for Gary

Burton at one point, and the famous jazz manager and booking agent Ted Kurland offered us a deal to go on the road and record. It was, for the music business, a pretty good deal, but in contrast to the steadiness and security of my medical career, and in thinking about my wife and child, it seemed impossible to take on the challenges of touring."

"I never expected to stay in Boston after my stint at NEC, but I found New York to be a 'cutting contest' which was very harsh, almost racism in reverse. I was sympathetic to the reason for this, but really preferred the camaraderie of playing with musicians like I had done in South Africa and in Boston. I'm somewhat wistful about those choices now, but I feel having my high tech studio with all the latest gear, enables me to keep my chops up and write music. I now produce about a CD's worth of music per month in my mini studio, playing all the instruments myself."

"I'm idealistic about music. Jazz is a bridge between races. Neither could exist without the other. Jazz is a very unique music and rock and roll exists only because of it. It's a mixture of European influences with sophisticated African rhythms, and it's a discourse, a conversation that is going on, that can only happen in the moment, in real time. It's being open to each other, in a creative context in which everyone is winning."