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Geekin' Out

How ReedGeek is Creating Better Musicians Around the World, One Gadget at a Time

by Victoria Wasylak

As Mauro Di Gioia picks up the phone to chat with *MMR* this past October, he's fresh off the plane for a trip to China, and awake a short seven hours after putting together an instructional video for a teacher at 1 a.m. It's all par for the course for the founder of ReedGeek, who like many entrepreneurs is happily enveloped in their "seven-day operation."

Except Di Gioia carries a touch more weight on his shoulders, since he literally invented and started a single industry: reed maintenance.

"Historically, people didn't do anything to maintain their reeds," Di Gioia explains. "We actually developed this industry. We were the first ones ever to come in and start to develop the tool that all woodwind players can use."

By developing tools to adjust reeds Di Gioia has developed a safe, easy, and kid-friendly way to ensure that players are getting the best sound possible.

It's nothing less than what you'd expect from this self-described "equipment person" and music entrepreneur. Right now, ReedGeek's roster of products includes everything from reed stabilizers to the ReedGeek Klangbogen bore and the ReedGeek "Universal" Classic tool.

Di Gioia's story begins on the West Coast, as alternative bands were beginning to boom in the 1990s.

"I'm a woodwind player by trade - predominantly single reeds," he explains. I grew up mainline Northern California and Northern Nevada. I had the chance to play in a lot of the bands up here. Went to school at UC Davis. At that time, a lot of bands were breaking out of that area - we used to play a lot with Cake and Cherry Poppin' Daddies."

From that experience, there was one trend that he quickly picked up on, and that was the difficulty that reeds could pose to active musicians.

"Everyone's bane of their existence is their reed if you're a woodwind player - you're constantly buying reeds," he says. From there, he started to craft tools that could be used to correct the shape of reeds for players, a safer alternative to reed knives. Admittedly, Di Gioia says that selling them was never part of the plan.

"It started very organically - I'd be giving one to a friend, and so forth. It's very much a story if the business grew just from getting out there quite literally - going to trade shows, people asking 'hey would you sell these?' Four years in, things really started picking up and looking like this isn't something you do on weekends anymore," Di Gioia says. "It's never a marketing plan where I feel like 'I



ReedGeek Founder Mauro Di Gioia

can see a lot of these, it's always 'can I contribute something?'"

"We were the first company and I was the first person to actually to introduce the first practical reed tool for both single or double reeds - something that was easy to use, something that people could use for adjusting and maintaining their reeds. Between single and double reeds, we have some of the top players in every genre that use the ReedGeek - major orchestras and touring musicians. And now we're in more than 20 countries."

Despite this growth, Di Gioia has maintained his roots, with facilities in Carson City, Nevada. But the gear is only one half of what ReedGeek prides itself on as a company; creating and selling his products is only part of his mission.

"ReedGeek is half-product and half-education," Di Gioia explains.

Most recently, Di Gioia was invited back to China by bassoonist, educator, and sponsor Stephen Ye after an initial trip in the spring, again bringing his reed knowledge and tools to top universities and conservatories, focusing on working with the sound, working with reeds, and having proper reed adjusting tools.

"He's been very instrumental in bringing myself, ReedGeek, and my knowledge of reed adjustments to the top universities and conservatories. We're teaching reed re-adjustments, a little bit about acoustics, and introducing the powers of ReedGeek. What's kind of happening in China [is] a lot of the students want the top stuff in the world, the really searched out the best things in the world - and so they're really active in bringing in the best players, clinicians and the best products."

Thus far, he's spoken at schools like the China Conservatory of Music Beijing, Wuhan Conservatory, and Shanghai Conservatory preparing students for upcoming festivals and clarinet camps, and he's currently working on developing more research on how to improve double reeds. Maybe it all seems a bit much to obsess and invest so much time and energy into a single category of MI, but the truth is, there's no such thing as "too much" when the reed is the gateway to good performances from woodwind players. When the reed's working well, Di Gioia says it just gets easier from there.

"The students are really are excited about understanding more about their reed, because it's really directly related to how well they play their instrument. That's something that can't be stressed and hasn't been stressed enough. When the reed is happy and you have control of your reed, everything is downstream from that." *MMR*