

Dustin Mollick

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How his time at UNT prepared him for the Jazz Ambassadors

Fresh from Army Basic Training with a brawny physique and interesting combination of tan lines, Dustin Mollick, a former UNT student, gave me some insights and stories about becoming the new baritone saxophonist for the Jazz Ambassadors. The group is the official touring jazz band of the United States Army. The Ambassadors have toured all 50 states as well as Canada, Mexico, Japan, India, and throughout Europe. To be one of the 19 members that make up this group you have to wait for a spot to open up when someone leaves the band. To replace the member, a lengthy and challenging audition process begins. This ensures the band will hire high quality musicians capable of playing their varied repertoire that includes big band swing, bebop, Latin, contemporary jazz, standards, popular tunes, Dixieland, vocals, and patriotic selections. Mollick passed the first round of the audition, sending in a recording with various jazz styles. The second stage was a live audition.

While packing up his Denton apartment, preparing for his move to Maryland, Dustin reminisces on his audition experience and how his time at UNT helped prepare him for it. From the time of his initial audition at UNT Dustin felt like he was preparing for these high level auditions, “The audition process [into UNT] itself is stressful. When I walked in for my audition I thought, here is this faculty of some of the best musicians in the world listening to me. What could I ever do to sound good to them? That kind of pressure from the beginning helps in later auditions.” Mollick stressed an import facet of UNT and Denton that proved helpful for

this audition, “It was good to get experience interacting with, performing with, working for, and working with so many different musicians in so many different settings. It quickly became obvious to me that these experiences were going to take my playing to a higher level.” Dustin also mentions from these settings he learned more about the social dynamics and social skills that are important for musicians to have in order to get hired, “[from doing all the gigs at around Denton] I quickly noticed that people were more interested in hiring you if they thought you were going to be fun or cool to have on the gig, rather than being the baddest player in town. Skill is something you need to have, but so many people here can get the job done. But if you’re fun to play with, won’t cause problems, and are reliable, you may get hired over someone who plays the same as or better than you.” This is something Mollick tried to incorporate into the interview part of his audition into the Jazz Ambassadors, “if it is a touring band like that, they’re trying to figure out who can we live with, sit on a bus with for hours at a time, and share a hotel with.”

Dustin’s experience playing baritone saxophone in UNT’s One O’ Clock Lab Band was the best training he could have had for this type of audition, “It was very intense. We played so many types of music and it was one of the busiest years for the One O’ Clock. On top of all those concerts we did a recording session, a tour in Europe and the US. It



Dustin Mollick shows off his Army certified buzz cut.

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was so busy and we would have to switch hats so much with the different styles. Sometimes while sight reading during a clinic or something. But it was my crash course in bari playing. If I made the One O’ Clock on alto or tenor my Jazz Ambassadors audition wouldn’t have gone the same way.”

Dustin will be moving to Maryland in a week to start his new job with the Jazz Ambassadors. He explained to me what he’s looking forward to in this new stage of his life, “I’ll go back to Maryland where they’re stationed in Ft. Meade. I’ll have three or four tours a year. Otherwise I stay in Maryland and have rehearsals and concerts. I’m looking forward to having some time to relax post basic training and post schooling. All I’ve known has been school. I’m looking forward to not being a student for a while and playing, performing, and being a professional musician. I can pursue my other musical interests like composition and the stuff I didn’t have as much time for when I was in school.”

You can see Dustin Mollick’s first performance with the Jazz Ambassadors on May 25, 2012, in Rochester, NY, at Kodak Hall in Eastman Theater. <http://www.armyfieldband.com/pages/ensembles/ja.html>