

Mindi World – April 2017

Theo Wanne - Mouthpiece Designer Extraordinaire by Pam McGregor

Theo Wanne is the eminent world expert on the design and manufacturing of saxophone and clarinet mouthpieces. His company's status as the world's leader in both quality and innovation is the culmination of many years of study and passion in this and other fields.

MindiWorld President Pam McGregor recently interviewed Theo on his development of Mindi's new mouthpiece.

What exactly does a mouthpiece do? A lot of our members probably don't realize how important this is.



Photo by Kari Coulter

The purpose of the mouthpiece is to create the instruments tone. The saxophones purpose is to amplify that tone and determine its pitch. While classical, rock, and jazz players may play the same horn, the mouthpiece will be very different. Think of choosing a mouthpiece like choosing a throat, you don't have to be stuck with the voice you were born with, you get to pick the sound you want!

I remember Mindi once told me, "When I was a girl my father was a rock & roll musician, and I was really inspired by him. In fact, I really wanted to sing like Tina Turner, but I was just a little girl then so singing like that was rather impossible. HOWEVER, with the saxophone and the right mouthpiece (said with a big grin) I could sound like Tina Turner."

I truly believe the saxophone is the most expressive instrument in the world. It gets more different types of sound, has more dynamics, and is the most expressive instrument out there. And the mouthpiece is what does most of that. I'm so honored to be a mouthpiece designer for the saxophone as there is so much that can be done. It's not stuck to one sound...I can continually improve and dial in many different types of sound for the saxophone. **Mindi and Theo Wanne**

How long did it take to create Mindi's model? How did you and Mindi start working together?

In 2011 Mindi contacted me to make a backup mouthpiece. She was travelling extensively and had no other mouthpiece that worked for her in case something happened to her current mouthpiece. She had tried working with the original manufacturer of that mouthpiece, however the mold used to make that mouthpiece had been destroyed, and they were unable to make a duplicate to her satisfaction.

I had always been a fan of Mindi's. I appreciated her unique voice and vast expression on the alto, so I was very happy to work her. Mindi is a fantastic person with a sincere desire to uplift her audience with her music, so our philosophies really worked well together too. More than building a mouthpiece together, our friendship really started at that time too.

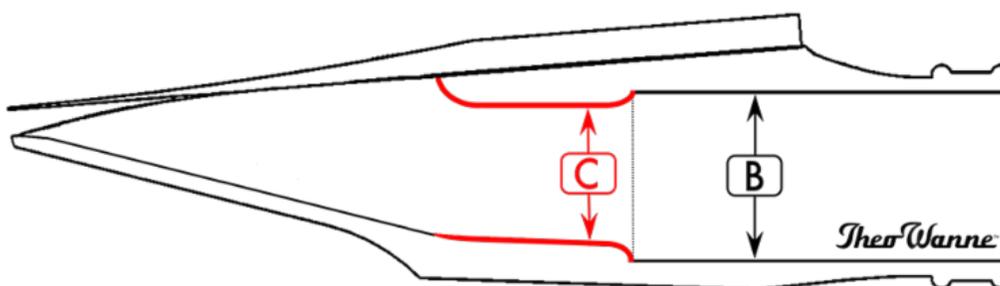
Mindi came to my shop in Bellingham, WA several times in the following three years to work on the mouthpiece, and I visited her before multiple concert dates to further work on the mouthpiece.

In 2015, Mindi's saxophone and mouthpiece were stolen. I received a desperate call from Mindi who needed her finished mouthpiece so she could continue playing. Mindi told me, "this must be the universe telling us to finish this project, and get our mouthpiece out to the world!" Fortunately, the mouthpiece design was already close to completion, so my head engineer (Matt Ambrose) and I stayed up for the next few days dialing in the mouthpiece until we felt it was even better than her original. We then sent it to Mindi and waited with baited breath to hear Mindi's response.

A day later Mindi called, "I can rock out like I never could before. Good job guys, the mouthpiece is better than I could have imagined! Also, my sound guy, whom I totally trust, just told me I sound better than I ever have too!" Since then Mindi and I continued to further improve the mouthpiece until it's now a final production version.

What makes it different?

Until Mindi's mouthpiece I primarily made large chamber mouthpieces. I really had to study hard to understand how to get a small chamber mouthpiece to sound big and fat.



The small chamber gives good projection, but often makes a saxophone sound thin too. A small chamber is when the chamber C (middle of the mouthpiece) is smaller than the bore B (the part of the mouthpiece that slides over the saxophone neck cork).

Besides the unique chamber design, there are many secrets in this mouthpiece I honestly don't really want to talk about. I can say for certain it is a bit of an engineering marvel.

Mindi and I really worked hard. Honestly, we were trying to do something never done before...get an alto mouthpiece to really can scream and shout, yet at the same time have a full free blowing sound. I must say I am very proud of what we came up with. I spent a fortune in this mouthpieces development but I truly feel we brought something special into the world that will make many musicians happy, and that is very satisfying.

Where is it available?

People can buy the mouthpiece from us directly (www.theowanne.com), from Mindi directly (mindiabair.com), on woodwind-brasswind (wwbw.com), Sam Ash (samash.com) or hopefully their local store. If your local store doesn't have it yet, have them contact us and we will set them up!



Is anybody recognizable in jazz or music using it?

Besides Mindi, I know Eric Darius is using the mouthpiece. I've really been happy with how many people are really taking to it.

Do you have any Mindi stories?

One of our design meetings was backstage at an Aerosmith concert. Mindi was touring with Aerosmith at the time. Cheap Trick was the opening act for Aerosmith, so Mindi and I got a chance to work together on her mouthpiece during Cheap Trick's performance. It was so fun watching Steven Tyler walk back and forth with Cheap Trick playing in the

background! I remember it really dawned on me then the scope of what we were doing. There really haven't been any mouthpieces designed specifically for that type of sound....to sound like Tina Turner or Steven Tyler...and we were doing that. And now I can say we achieved that! That is such an amazing feeling!

Mindi adds, ***"Theo is a master craftsman and creative genius. His mouthpieces have allowed me to take my music to the next level".***

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