

Neil Grover 29 Bigelow St Cambridge, MA 02139



George Gaber
1909 Arden Drive
Bloomington, IN 47401

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Hi Neil,

How wonderful to meet you and share those warm thoughts about Joe Castka. Also, your domicile on the Island sounded familiar.

I knew Joe way back when I was a kid and listening to him, Gladstone and Gusikoff. How interesting that Gladstone told me that his respect for Gusikoff was so great that he'd play bass drum and cymbals to Gusikoff. Gusikoff was my snare drum teacher, Joe taught me keyboards. Later on in time, I had the privilege of playing with the three of them at various 'gigs'. That was truly good fortune.

I admire your entrepreneurship. Perhaps one day you'll make on of my stix, eh? Take care and good luck.

P.S. Your performance career is illustrious. Bravo!

George

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Pro Percussion Products

Professor George Gaber
1909 Arden Drive
Bloomington, IN 47401

Grover Pro Percussion, Inc.
29 Bigelow Street
Cambridge, Massachusetts
USA 02139
☎ (617) 354-3786
Fax (617) 354-DRUM

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Dear George,

Please forgive me for my tardy response! It has been a real zoo around here for the past few months. You can imagine trying to play full time AND work a 9-5 !! I must be crazy!!

I can't tell you how many time Joe Castka spoke about you, he was obviously very proud of your tremendous successes. I consider myself a very lucky man to have studied with Mr. Castka. If you permit me I would like to tell you how I came to study with him.

As you know I grew up in Bellmore on Long Island. I studied drums at a local music school (which in later years turned into the L.I. Drum Shop, Jerry Ricci was also a student with me). When I got into high school I turned my interests from rock to concert band music. The summer of my freshman year in H.S. I was lucky to be able to join the Hofstra University Wind Ensemble on a tour of Europe. As I was inept at that time the guys in the section helped along. When I returned I joined a community orchestra in Oceanside. It turns out that the conductor was William Lockwood, a former fiddle player (did you know him?) and Joe Castka was a payed "ringer". Well standing next to Joe Castka was a life changing experience! He was very nice to me but did not want to take any student at the time. Well after pleading with him he agreed. (By the way, I also joined a youth summer band under the direction of Jack Berv, who was a great influence on me) For the next 4 years, every Saturday I would go to his house in Whitestone and spend 3 hours with him! He forced me to learn to play keyboard, timpani and to sit at his piano for 30 min doing ear training! I'll never forget the time he picked up a pair of his K Zildians and produce the most beautiful "zing" I have ever heard! Hearing all the stories about the great NY percussionists was a lesson alone in history!

By the time I started to drive I used to spend the whole day at Mr. Castka's house. After our lesson I would take him shopping, for he was in failing health and getting around was difficult. Also at that time a relative of his from Czechoslovakia came. She stayed with the Castka's and I understand she was a doctor but was studying to get the proper accreditation in the US. Well Mr. Castka was not doing well at this time and something happened that made the relative leave suddenly. I never did know what.

For college I came up to Boston to study with Vic Firth and in my first year here I got a call from Louis D'Agistino (remember him he later studied with you) telling me that Mr. castka was

ill and was asking for me. Well I dropped everything and drove down to NY to see him. He was literally on his death bed when I saw him and was not rational. To this day it upsets me to think about it. He kept asking for me yet he did not recognize me when he saw me. He died a few days later and I visited his wife shortly afterward. She gave me a great picture of him with his Gladstone BD taken I think in the 30's.

George, I would like to compile some information about the great percussionists of NY perhaps you can help me. Mr. Castka mentioned some names that I am not familiar with, would you be so kind as to comment about each? Here is the list, and please add to it as I'm sure there are many I have left off:

Sam Borodkin, Max Manny, Dave Gusikoff (who you mentioned in your letter), Gil Brines (Joe said he had a fantastic sd roll), Milton Schlesinger (I met him a few times in Long Beach). Also, do you know who played percussion (xylo) on the old Max Fleisher "Popeye" cartoons? These were recorded in NY, I think in Brooklyn.

I appreciate any information you can give me, I want to write an article for PAS. Also, do you know where Mr. Castka studied and with whom? I never did find out.

I hope everything is well with you!

Yours,


Neil