

Bill Yeager

Welcome and congratulations to the graduating class of 2017. You, your family, your friends should all be proud of this important achievement in your lives. We all find our way through life, but not always in the same way. Some of you came to SDSU knowing exactly what your major and what your future professions will be. Others of you came to SDSU as a means of discovering what your passion in life is. Still others of you will get this degree and end up doing something completely different. My advice to you is to be prepared for any and all opportunities that are offered to you in life. You don't always end up doing exactly what you think you will be doing for your life's work. When I was in your shoes, I would have never imagined myself being a college professor. I knew I was going to be a musician ever since I was in the 4th grade and started to play the trombone.

As an elementary school kid being successful in music gave me added self-confidence, from this added self-confidence I improved in all areas of my studies. I hope the knowledge and experiences you have gained at SDSU will also build your self-confidence in all your future endeavors. When I arrived at the University of North Texas, as a seventeen year old freshman, there was no doubt I would be a music major. In 1970, the University of North Texas was the largest music school in the United States and the most prestigious jazz studies program in the country. During my six years there I was fortunate enough to break in the studio scene in Dallas and was able to gain a tremendous amount of professional performance experience. I felt I was now ready to take on an even bigger market, the studio scene in Los Angeles. Soon I was playing on motion pictures like the Rocky movies, TV shows like Bob Hope and Hawaii-Five-O. Records with the likes of Ray Charles, as well as performing with many headliners that Dean Gattas mentioned in my introduction, some Grammy nominations came my way too. But there was something missing, I did not realize that teaching was such an important part of my life. This was a surprise to me, as I thought I was destined to be strictly a performer.

This revelation sparked my founding the Los Angeles jazz workshop. The workshop attracted some of the finest talent in Southern California and many of those students are now at the cutting edge of today's music scene. Some of my former LA Jazz workshop students have been guest stars in clinicians here at San

Diego State. All these experiences helped prepare me for my future at SDSU. Upon accepting my position at SDSU, I did not want to give up all my professional connections or my school in Los Angeles right away. My solution was to obtain my pilot's license and buy an airplane a Cessna 172. I commuted by air three or four times a week until I eventually received tenure and moved to Cardiff by the sea in North County. I have become very attached to my SDSU students and totally committed to San Diego State University. The SDSU Jazz Studies program has flourished into becoming one of the best in the country.

Two weeks ago I returned from a remarkable journey in Germany. I was the guest of the German government representing the United States on an international panel from eighteen other nations to assess the German Jazz music scene Jazz Aush-Duetschland. I was in Berlin, Hamburg, and Bremen. I was asked for my opinions of the Jazz programs at the major conservatories, various professional venues, and at the Jazz convention in Bremen which is the largest Jazz convention in the world. I must say the Europeans, especially the Germans, appreciate and support our original art form in some ways more than we do in America. I met hundreds of musicians from all over the world, but we all had Jazz as our mutual language. I was able to promote SDSU on an international stage that will hopefully open many doors in the future. Again congratulations, remember you never stop learning, this is simply the beginning of the next phase of your education. Always follow your passion in life thanks.