

Jeremy Barrett, LiveWell Interview

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SPEAKERS

Dr. Wendy Slusser, Jeremy Barrett

J Jeremy Barrett 00:00

Really, when you're talking about music being reflective of those emotions, music is like the most resemblance of feeling and emotion than than anything, I think in the entire world and Quincy Jones says the same thing. Your music is no more than who you are as a human being Quincy John says that all the time and I can't agree more.

D Dr. Wendy Slusser 00:26

Hello, everyone. Thanks for tuning in to the live well podcast with me Dr. Wendy Slusser, the Associate Vice Provost of the Semel healthy campus initiative Center, which is referenced as ACI throughout this episode. Let me start by saying I had so much fun with the interview we have for you today. If you're looking for some motivating stories, humor, wisdom, and a creative spark this episode is for you. I got to catch up with someone who left a huge impact on campus, not just with his magnetic presence, but with his love for music. Jeremy Barrett is a class of 2019 UCLA graduate, who with the help of Semel HCI, started the piano project. If you've been on campus, you know what this is, you've likely heard beautiful music as you walk on Varun walk and up to the hill. Today, we dive deep into what the piano project at UCLA looks like, how it was started, and how it led Jeremy to work with his greatest hero in the music industry. Quincy Jones. Jeremy discusses the balance between his artistic self and his business self, and the art of making things happen for yourself through preparation and courage. Enjoy. All right, Jeremy, we're gonna do it.

J Jeremy Barrett 01:48

So good to see you again. When did I miss your beautiful face? Jane as well, the whole team over there?

D Dr. Wendy Slusser 01:55

Well, you're in our hearts, Jeremy. And we, you know, you live on at UCLA with piano project and your return, hopefully another time with your wonderful band. As part of your creativity. I remember how you pitch the piano project. And let's just imagine, so for everyone who doesn't know much about UCLA, it's a 400 acre campus in the heart of Los Angeles, right? And you imagined putting pianos outside around campus. So anyone could drop in, describe to me one of the spots where these piano this piano is and how it operates.

J Jeremy Barrett 02:36

Right. So it's a piano that's in the middle of campus, where anyone can go up and just play. And you don't have to be a piano player. You don't have to be a music major. You don't even necessarily have to even like music, it can be a place where people hang out. The whole point is to encourage people getting together and having a human interaction. Noticing that, you know, the walk to campus, back and forth was a little dull. I'm a fan of old culture like the 60s and 70s. You know, I love just the Beatles and old music. On top of that, I love the culture that was around at that time. And I was looking at pictures and videos of UCLA and people are really out there like throwing frisbees and having conversations in the grass. And I realized that a lot of my walks to campus on Bruin walk were kind of flooded with people staring down at their phones, maybe just trying to get to their class walk back to their apartments with their heads down. So that's kind of the initial thought on the piano project was let's give some students and faculty and staff a little bit of like fire in their day. Really, that's that's how this project started. These pianos were placed in in four different locations when I was a senior, which was 2019. And they were they were placed at right outside the John Wooden center. They were placed at B plate, which is an amazing, amazing UCLA cafeteria, and there was one at the Luskin conference center. And there was one at Cobo. And these were all different locations where we saw that a lot of people can congregate here,

D Dr. Wendy Slusser 04:28

you've really transformed the campus to be one that not only has music playing, but also has that capacity to promote friendship and you've reached that and it continues which is kind of extraordinary.

J Jeremy Barrett 04:43

Yeah, it's awesome. After graduating to see that not only that it's still there, but people are really excited and I've had countless amount of people reach out that they've wanted to help and it's really cool to see ever since graduating and not having as much I'm so used to that. Now people really want to push it further and even expand to more locations and get more more activations around these pianos. It's really exciting to see,

D Dr. Wendy Slusser 05:12

I wanted to just have you describe how you felt after the pianos were scattered around the campus. What feelings did you feel at that point?

J

Jeremy Barrett 05:24

pure, pure joy. Really, I think there's probably two different feelings of joy. One was, Well, finally, all this hard work has paid off. And we can kind of rest a little bit, I think that was kind of the first feeling of joy. And then the obvious one being Wow, we've done something amazing here all together as a team, we've done something awesome that people are going to be really affected by and the my favorite stories that I hear is when someone meets their their lovers at the piano, I remember, remember, last time I was at the piano, three different occasions, someone told me, Oh, I met, I met my new girlfriend here. And then one second later, a student was like, Hey, I jammed with my professor here, I never thought I'd become close with my professor. And then another second later, someone was like, I met my best friend here. This was an opportunity where, you know, I was an incoming freshman, I wasn't able to really make friends quickly. But I made friends at the piano. So really having this instrument not just an instrument of tune, but an instrument of peace, where people know it's an all inclusive, and it's going to be a place where people can just feel free and accepted. And that's the part where it goes a little beyond just the notes, and just the sound and just music. It's it can be a place where people can come together, and come together, we're, we're sure more mighty than just a one man team.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 07:01

The Quincy Jones book called 12 notes on life and creativity is there's one chapter that really reminds me of you, it's chapter C sharp, and it's always be prepared for a great opportunity. And I feel like thinking back since the day I met you, I feel like that has been something that has really been a theme in your life. And I'd love you to tell me how this kind of wisdom of always be prepared to be for a great opportunity that's in your life.

J

Jeremy Barrett 07:32

Definitely. That's one of my favorite chapters as well. It was really awesome, helping put that book together. It's basically Quincy Jones's kind of life story and his lessons and his his advice to the younger generation about music and life. When I tell the story with the UCLA piano project, a lot of times people are like, wow, things just like you got very lucky and things just kind of fell in your lap. And then how UCLA, the piano project turned into that celebration, which then introduced me to Quincy Jones, which then introduced me to, you know, the job here. So what's behind the scenes is being mentally prepared and being in a in a position where you're ready to just absolutely attack and execute, because those opportunities they come once in once in a blue moon. But when they do come, you just gotta be totally ready. And Quincy talks about that all the time, you know.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 08:30

So reflecting back in time, tell us about all the thinking and preparation you did for the piano project. I mean, that allowed you to come and present at the healthy campus initiative steering committee. And when you presented that, when you presented at the steering committee, it

just felt so magical learning about your project, and then boom, it happened. But it was all that preparation that you did that crystallized the deal for the three pianos to be scattered around campus. Tell us about that.

J Jeremy Barrett 09:01

HCI does an amazing job at activating the campus. And that's why I loved working together because I was trying to get this project off the ground but was having trouble finding funding in actually an initiative like HCI that would kind of introduce me to the right people. And, you know, talk to the Chancellor and get approvals with the fire marshals, etc. That's very tough to do as a student. When I came to HCI it was I was totally accepted with open arms. And I think with you know, the power of Wendy and Jane and the whole team, it was very special to have the projects get lifted off the ground when I met with Chancellor block, which I think it was another part of luck in the story is there is this lottery sort of thing that UCLA does where you enter your email for a chance to have a meeting with the chancellor somehow Out of probably 1000s of students that enter into that raffle. I was chosen for whatever reason, I thought about this piano project. And that's kind of where I was getting excited about it. And oh, these ideas, I could actually see this working. And I get to talk to the chancellor. So maybe he'd be excited about it as well. It went really well. And Chancellor block still talks about that meeting whenever I see him, which is not very often now. But we we have a good laugh over that story.

D Dr. Wendy Slusser 10:32

That was something the stars were aligned for you at that point. And I think your passion around music is where you're leading us. And I wanted to know, has music always been part of your life?

J Jeremy Barrett 10:48

Yeah. The funny dynamic that I that was in my childhood is growing up as a half Korean person. And my mom is full Korean. My dad is just some some white guy from Colorado. So it's a great combo. My dad was actually a bass player, he put me and my brother in a band when I was in third grade, and my brother was in fifth grade. So we've been playing together ever since then. I'm 25. Now, I think I was probably 10 years old at that point. So me and they who's my brother, we've been playing in a band ever since since that third grade talent show. And why I brought up my Korean mother is because, you know, growing up in that household, my mom wasn't as excited about the music than my dad was. Which was a pretty fun, dynamic, you know, band practices in the house where the bass is rumbling the walls of the house, were not very pleasing to a small Asian mother who just wants peace and quiet.

D Dr. Wendy Slusser 11:48

Well, Jeremy, I really remember meeting your mom at the kickoff of the piano project. And she seems like she really has come around and loves your performances with your brother. Definitely. It seems like all of this was leading up to the day of the HCI celebration, where Quincy Jones was being honored. Can you tell us about that story?

J

Jeremy Barrett 12:10

Guest of Honor was Mr. Quincy Jones. When I heard that news, I was just wow, this is one of my biggest heroes of all time. So I worked really hard in helped with that event, which then led to me getting food with Quincy Jones out on the campus. And after talking for some time, Quincy Jones gave me his personal business card, which had his personal email had his personal phone number. And a little something that I'm going to say a little later on in the story. But for the next three months, it was me emailing Quincy Jones, his personal account, email account, and calling him and not getting any response. So I also tried to find my boss now his name's Adam hunted down his email, also no response for three months. But then I realized on Quincy Jones, his personal business card was his house address. So after three months, this was that when I already graduated, I ended up driving with my brother to Quincy Jones's house. And as a young college kid, you know, we're just so excited. Also a little nervous. We're like, oh, what's gonna happen? The first gate, there's two gates to Quincy, his house, the first gate was under construction. So we drive right in to Quincy his driveway. We go up to his door, we knock on his door, only to be yelled at by Security Security yells at us being like, never come to quiz us house without a meeting. And we're a little college kids. So we got really scared. But we also brought him a gift with us, which was sugar free popsicles. So we left popsicles in his mailbox. It was a blazing hot day, so they probably melted. And then we ran off in a hurry that to our home. Two weeks later, I ended up getting a job interview, which then turned into the job.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 14:05

Perseverance.

J

Jeremy Barrett 14:09

Sure, there was a bit of magical enchantment, and I got some great opportunities, but these opportunities would never have gone anywhere, if I wasn't prepared for them. And that's exactly what that chapter is about. And my favorite story that Quincy says about this topic is with Will Smith, Will Smith was discovered by Quincy Jones. They were there at a party somewhere in Hollywood, and there's a bunch of execs that are at the party. And there's this script for Fresh Prince of Bel Air, which is, you know, kind of Wilson Wilson, like meaning claim to fame. Like, okay, we have all these execs at this party right now. I have lawyers that are in the limousine. Will you got to do an audition right now in front of everybody at the party and we'll Like, hey man, like, Could I could I prepare? Like, can you give me a week? Maybe we can do it next week? He's like, sure, sure. I can wait, I can give you a week. But I'll tell you, I'll tell you right now, these guys won't be here next week. Will Smith just like, all right, you know what I trust the new Quincy Jones. He just did the he did the audition right there at the party. And all of all the execs loved it. And then that's how he got the part. And that's how he became such a big star. You know, that was the start. I mean,

D

Dr. Wendy Slusser 15:30

just said, so many examples of how being prepared has opened up the door for you. And then also some of these really, now very famous people. I mean, Quincy has been such a mentor

and leader for you and his vision of world peace and something that you've shared with me. But even before you worked with Quincy, this sense of your entrepreneurial, or your creative vision can actually be realized this mindset that you have, but how have you translated it to your current position?

J Jeremy Barrett 16:04

That's an exciting question for me to answer because maybe I don't seem like a full time job kind of guy. That's because I do work more hours than a full time job, really. But I work from the heart. And something that has been very important to me is to do the right thing. And if you're in the right place, then then things like money and success will come naturally. And you know, Quincy says the same thing. And I keep mentioning Quincy is one of my biggest heroes, and I'm so excited to work for him. It's all about kind of following your heart and doing the right thing and following those urges and impulses that you get. And if you're doing that the money and success will come naturally. But what's most important is, is building a sense of community and trying to be a factor and world peace. You know, Quincy Jones at 90 years of age is saying that his life is just beginning. And that's because he's so excited to work because he's not working for any sort of really success. He's working out of his heart. I think it's noticeable that when we work on a project that I'm working out of passion first. And of course, there's going to be tedious things actually, every day, there's tedious things that I don't necessarily enjoy. I mean, that's a lot. That's a lot of time, nine to five, but I'm able to bring, you know, an exciting energy to the office, we're working for such an amazing human being in also a company, also that drives me to be to get things done quickly. What I learned from the UCLA piano project was, we had a very short time to make all these things happen. I love operating very quickly, then that same, that same feeling of of like when you're excited about it, you got to go off your impulse like that. And I feel the same way with writing music. If you have an idea. Just finish it right there. That's been important in all aspects of life for me is just going off excitement and capitalizing on on it. As soon as you can

D Dr. Wendy Slusser 18:19

tell, that's a great piece of advice for everyone is once you've got the green light, go for it because things can change or circumstances might change. Back to that story you shared about Quincy and Will Smith right? Do it. Right. Don't Don't wait. Now that you have this job with Quincy, and you also have your band, how are you balancing the two lifestyle?

J Jeremy Barrett 18:43

Oh, man. You might want to ask my boss about that over there. That's a great question. When do you because honestly, I don't I haven't mastered it. The thing about working in the industry and also being an artist and performer is those are two separate caps. And I used to do the thing where I'm trying to wear one cap and do everything at the same time. But what has really helped me is okay, after five or six when I'm done with my music industry job, which is Quincy Jones productions, I'm going to kind of take that cap off and then put on the artist, performer cap. And that's something that has really helped me. I think, you know, subliminally I do wear both caps at the same time. I'm happy that it's the music industry and then music because a lot of the times those do cross over, I think, well my company here at Quincy Jones productions

really likes about me is that I'm able to talk to artists, when some people may be better on the books and are less personable with an artist but because I play both parts, I'm able to would be really connect with the artists and make them feel comfortable. And actually structured deals like how an artist would want and in their favor.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 20:09

Your response is just so reflective of how much of a deep and thoughtful thinker you are. And that leads me to that quote from an excerpt of an article you wrote, and I'm going to read the quote, and I'd love to get a little bit more detail from you on it. But from pain to pianos to Quincy Jones is the name of the article, I decided to take a solo journey to Yosemite, the 12 hour Glacier Point hike to clear my head a bit. If you knew me, I was the furthest from one of those Patagonia Morning guys. That's true. I was more so one of those guys who party like Zeplin, ditched class loved going on multiple dates a week, you get the picture. At the top of this, I saw the face of God, I'm not joking, like an actual face. His voice was the clearest I've ever heard anything that was not human. He spoke to me with an irresistible urge to be a factor in the fight for world peace by using the power of music. Now this excerpt is so honest and displays a really wonderful self awareness, but also your insight, and you're almost honoring music in a way that I feel many of us feel when they listen to music, and the expression of it.

J

Jeremy Barrett 21:30

Yeah, that's, I haven't read that article in a very long time. And that just made me actually a little emotional. Thank you for choosing that. And that hike to Yosemite was a very special point. It was part of a coming of age story for myself, as you know, growing up and in college is a very developmental time for the young man's brain trip that I took to somebody was because my both of my parents were pretty ill in the hospital and for different reasons, but they're all in the same week. And now it's a very humbling experience for a college kid that really his whole life hasn't had much gone wrong for him. It did, it did a stem from a place of pain. But I'm just like when when a seed grows in germinates into a plant, it kind of goes through pain to grow. And I liked that word germinates because it also sounds like my brother and I mean, my brother, Jerome and Nate. But really, when you're talking about music being reflective of those emotions, music is like, the most resemblance of feeling and emotion than than anything, I think in the entire world. And Quincy Jones says the same thing. Your music is no more than who you are as a human being. Quincy Jones says that all the time, and I can't agree more.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 23:00

That makes me think we're doing a project with Louie Schwartzberg, you know, is moving art, you know, fantastic fungi that that artist, what you're describing to me is this sense of awe that you had with nature, which is what Louis picks in his moving art? And how much clarity comes from that? Can you speak to other parts of your life where you had that sense of awe?

J

Jeremy Barrett 23:28

Yeah. I will say that nature is so incredible to me. I think it's just like God's creation in its most

Yeah, I will say that nature is so incredible to me, I think it's just like God's creation in its most natural form. And to me, in a world where there's so many screens, especially after COVID, there's so many screens, and increasingly, I think the generations the new, newer generations are becoming very flooded with content. That's why you see the kind of more short attention spans, it's really hard to stay present. And whenever I see an amazing sunset, or a beautiful ocean, and or like a hiking Yosemite, it really just kind of resets me in. I do you have that sense of awe? Where it's like, this is kind of our primal nature, as technology is kind of changing the world and how we think and how much distraction there is, I think nature is is really important.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 24:27

Well, one of the one of the striking themes in your life that since I've known you, Jeremy, is that you've been working towards world peace. And you mentioned that when you pitch the piano project as one step towards that through music, I know that Quincy also has this vision and how are you moving that your vision of world peace forward in the work you're doing now?

J

Jeremy Barrett 24:52

It all revolves still around music, and the power of music, and how music can really bring people together. I think you Music is able to really affect people's in in ways that communication can't like we make music because we got to communicate things that you might not be able to communicate with your own voice and language. You know, it's its own language really, the time during the UCLA piano project, it felt very fast and very, there's a lot of stimulation happening very quickly. And now, when I got got to the real world, I realize that we're building things and we're building them a little slower. Still at a fast pace. But you know, Rome wasn't built in one day, we're playing a long game of, you know, working for Quincy Jones. It's been like almost like a master's degree because he's telling me stories of Ray Charles, Billie Holiday, Frank Sinatra, that you're not going to hear in the history books. I feel like I'm more educated than ever, and still fighting for music to be a big part of people's lives. And I think that's, that's kind of my key to help with world peace is doing it with with music.

D

Dr. Wendy Slusser 26:11

That's really lovely. And very accessible for people to be able to understand that.

J

Jeremy Barrett 26:17

We have two ears and one mouth.

D

Dr. Wendy Slusser 26:20

Yeah, that's right. What sounds you know, you just mentioned a lot of the stories and the wisdoms that Quincy has shared with you, what would you highlight as some of the ones that you've picked up along the way that have helped you in what you call your master degree of life?

J

Jeremy Barrett 26:38

Yes, every time I see him, which is, which is fairly often, it's almost like you're talking to some sort of wise Yoda. He'll drop these kind of life bombs on you constantly. Um, some of the things that he says that really sticks out to me is when he talks about his success, and he's saying the most important thing on how he's maintained, his success is being humble with his success. He's one of the most humble kind of people I've ever met. Of course, he has done some of the most amazing things in the world. But whenever he talks about his success, it's almost like, he's talking to me, like, I'm some sort of superstar like, I'm, I'm one of his heroes, which is not shouldn't be the case at all, because I've done nothing even close to what he's done. But when he looks at you, in your eyes, it's you can feel he's giving you all the attention and just talks to you like you're the only person in the room. It's a pretty crazy feeling. And he's always talking about how an ego or an ego is is an overdressed insecurity. And that's something that sticks out to me is keeping the egos low, having an open mind in working hard. And really,

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 28:03

those are great, again, accessible pieces of advice for everyone to be able to embrace. And you've you have a real knack, Jeremy, of having people want to mentor you. And you certainly have found an incredible inspiration. I am Quincy. So I'm, I'm really glad. And I can't wait to see you, in your next five years where you land to I'd like to end this with just a question about, you know, what does it mean for you to live? Well?

J

Jeremy Barrett 28:31

Well, thank you for the kind words, Wendy, I really couldn't have done it without you and Jane and the whole HCI team, it's it's feels so awesome to have this beautiful team that has helped me come to where I am today. And I'm forever grateful for me to live well consists of a lot of things. Definitely, I'm a big proponent of being outside and being off social media. And I think it's just really important to be outside and be in nature. And the more that we're kind of looking at our screens all day, the more we get distracted, and it's more difficult to be present. And I think a big part of living well is being present. And understanding where you are right now and that the past in the future. Don't matter as much as what's here right now. And a lot of what is on our screens and what's on our phones is is driving a lot of worry and maybe anxiety on on what we can be in the future and what we're supposed to be and that's why I think being out in nature and doing things that you love. And things that are natural to you are very important in a very, very important part of living well.

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Dr. Wendy Slusser 29:52

Well, it's almost a full circle when you talk about being present and being thoughtful where you are goes back to the theme of being Ready for an opportunity. So, thank you Jeremy, what a pleasure to catch up and learn more about what you've been up to. What a treat to be able to do it in person, or on Zoom land.

J Jeremy Barrett 30:12

Yeah, on Zoom, and this was, this was a big treat is really good to catch up with you, Wendy. I love you and I love the whole team HCI it's really awesome to talk to you again.

D Dr. Wendy Slusser 30:24

I'm so grateful to know Jeremy and to see him continue moving in the direction of his dreams. I hope he reminded all of you of the importance of leveraging the moment being prepared and trusting your creative instincts. It certainly reminded me of that importance. If you have an inspiring story to tell, or know someone who may have won in the world of health and well being visit the podcast page on our website at healthy.ucla.edu to let us know. We want to hear from you. So follow us on Instagram @healthyUCLA. And thanks for being here to listen and live well with us. Talk to you soon.