

>> This is Matt Raymond [assumed spelling] at the Library of Congress. Each year, thousands of book lovers of all ages visit the nation's capital to celebrate the joys of reading and lifelong literacy at the Library of Congress National Book Festival. Co-chaired in 2009 by President Barack Obama and First Lady Michele Obama. Now in its ninth year, this free event, held Saturday, September 26 on the National Mall in Washington D.C. will spark readers passion for learning as they interact with the nation's best-selling authors, illustrators and poets. Even if you can't attend in person, you can still participate online. These podcasts with well-known authors and other materials are available through the National Book Festival website at www.LOC.gov/bookfest. It's now my pleasure to talk with Rickey Minor. Micky Minor -- Mr. Minor I should say, is the -- [inaudible] fumble there, we'll go right ahead. Mr. Minor is the Emmy nominated music director for the international sensation "American Idol." He's traveled extensively to collaborate with some of the top recording artists of our time, including Whitney Houston, Christina Aguilera, Alicia Keys, Ray Charles and Beyonce. His impressive resume also includes the Grammy's and the Superbowl. And new to his list of accomplishments is his best-selling memoir, There's No Traffic on the Extra Mile . Mr. Minor, welcome to you.

>> Well, thank you.

>> Pleasure to talk with you today. The last time I saw you, you were actually at the Library of Congress and you were helping celebrate the achievements of Stevie Wonder as he was given the Gershwin prize for popular song. Tell me what that was like for you.

>> That was such an incredible evening, you know, I've worked with Stevie over the last -- I would guess, over the last ten years or so, closely and when I received the call to come in and produce this -- this tribute to him I was honored. And working with the various -- you know, he really wanted to show the wide range of music genres that -- that really spark him and interest him. So, there was, you know, we wanted to make sure there was someone from the jazz [inaudible] and -- and classical and opera and so and so forth. So, it was a night to collect a group of people.

>> Now, if we can just I guess go back in time a little bit -- what made you decide that you wanted to pursue a career in music?

>> Well, you know, I started out at 14 years old playing the bass guitar and immolating Jermaine Jackson because we had a singing group that, you know, all -- all kids wanted to immolate the Jackson Five at that time. And we're talking about around 19 -- early, mid '70s, '74 -- '73, '74 and I really -- I played bass because I sang Jermaine Jackson's part. So that's the only reason I played that instrument. But I think, you know, music is such a great thing in any [inaudible] you created. And it just sparked an interest in me that -- that I couldn't -- couldn't shake and never wanted to after that.

>> What do you think is the key to the success that you've had?

>> You know, I think part of it is -- is working diligently and working hard at something that -- that you love and finding that -- that thing which you love and having the talent to go with the passion. But the other part, I think the other 60% is your ability to work with people and I think that people want to feel like, you know, you really care about them and you're easy. You know, I always say, "Happy to be here, easy to work with." And that's what people want. They don't want any drama at work. If you're difficult, you don't show up on time, I mean there are a lot of variables why -- why people sabotage their own success.

>> Now I know that one of your mentors is the legendary Quincy Jones. How is he important to your life?

>> Well, you know, I -- he was very important because you know, when you meet someone who is doing or has done what -- what is your passion and your desires, then you get a glimpse at what it takes just from their -- their aura, their presence, it's huge. So, if you can surround yourself with the people who are doing the things that you want to do and that's what -- what I was able to do by meeting him and not pushing myself on him, but being there and letting him recognize that I was passionate about the music for the sake of the music and for nothing else. Now if we could talk about your book a little bit, There's No Traffic on the Extra Mile , it's very inspirational and motivational. What could you -- how would you describe your book?

>> Well, I would describe it as -- as a self-help memoir with -- with the intent to help you figure out how to get out of your own way and how to manifest your destiny. And so the stories are short -- just short stories about various ways how to get out -- how to get out of your own way, chapters like "Blinded by Arrogance," short story about me and the mistakes that I made and what I learned from it. And you know, to where you can have a gift in a certain area and feel like, you know, like you've arrived and your own arrogance can really stop you from moving forward.

>> And what inspired you to write the book?

>> I started in, I believe it was January last year. And I had six months to write it and then, all of the other preparations of -- of the copyediting and all of the packaging had to be done for release. And it was released in -- in December of last year. So, it's been out now about -- about nine months.

>> Okay. Well and I, like tens of millions of other people am an avid American Idol fan, so I'm wondering, are the lessons in the book the same kinds of things that you mentor the contestants in?

>> Absolutely. There's -- there are five main chapters and at the end of each chapter there is a story that relates the American idol contestants. And so, it really gives a -- because I really believe that the -- the American Idol experience really encapsulates the -- the journey that we all face. You know, they face the same fears of how to -- they just do it in a short period, but we all want to know how to get to our passion and then how to work in that -- and the natural act of -- I have a chapter

called "The Natural Act of Hitting the Wall" and we all will face a time where we push ourselves to the limit and there's a breakdown -- be it a mental breakdown or a physical breakdown, you know, it -- if you worked, pushed so hard and then you get a cold, I mean, how do you recover from those things as a singer. If you're an athlete and you have a -- a, you know, you sprained your ankle or something physical happens, how do you prepare yourself for those setbacks, you know, that we all face?

>> Now I think your -- your book clearly tries to impart a lot of advice and knowledge. Is there anything that you think you learned about yourself in the process of writing it?

>> Say it again please, I'm sorry.

>> I said, the book is obviously full of advice and -- and I think can really impart knowledge and what I'm curious about is if the process of writing it helped you learn anything about yourself.

>> Well, absolutely. I mean, there's no way that you cannot grow from having an opportunity to sit down and reflect on your journey. So, I think that it really helped me to understand how important relationships are because, you know, there comes a time when you're working and you feel like, you can do it on your own, but this book has helped me to realize that you need, you know, you don't -- you need everyone to -- to help you move forward in your life in every area. So, not just work, but you need your family, your friends, you need those relationships to be strong. And I think that it helped me to reach out to some relationships that were damaged for one reason or the other, either -- either one or both of us were short sided and in our view of what happened and -- and just misinformed. I had people who may have been angry about something that I didn't even know, you know, I had people who were angry with me and for not hiring them for a job, not knowing that I had called them and they had never got the message. So I mean, little simple things like that in repairing your relationship, you know?

>> One of the stories I found interesting from your past is about -- it's related to Whitney Houston's famous, I think iconic really, 1991 performance of the "Star Spangled Banner," but at the time there -- there was actually resistance to that version.

>> Well, absolutely. Well, you know, you have to remember that change is something for all of us that it's very difficult to readily accept because, you know, we're so used to the status quo, you know, if it's not broke, don't fix it. It just -- it works. And this is the national anthem after all and no one had taken any liberties or any opportunities to change the national anthem. It was exactly the way it is every time you hear it. And so, it had the waltz tempo and no one -- so when I introduce this new arrangement to it, there was definitely some resistance and -- and it's only until it's proven that people will, not only accept it, but now use it as, you know, I mean it is the bar in which --

>> Yeah.

>> -- the national anthem is sung. And I produced several since then with various artists and they always go back to her version and use that as a -- as a barometer.

>> Yeah. And you put that in a four four tempo. Is that correct?

>> Yeah.

>> Okay.

>> Yeah.

>> Yeah, that's definitely something that's memorable about that.

>> And that was inspired by -- by Marvin Gaye put it in a four four tempo, but he really put it out of [inaudible]. It wasn't in -- it was in a four four meter, but the -- phrase would come in the middle of the bar, at the end and he just took his time and sometimes just let the -- let the drum machine go and -- and he did -- for the NBA All-star Game, it's -- it's an amazing version. And that was -- it was inspired by that in talking to Whitney and she said, "The way he took his time, I want to be able to take my time."

>> Yeah.

[Inaudible Speaker]

Well, in retrospect, it sure seems like there shouldn't have been any resistance and it was clearly -- clearly the right choice. Where would you say your greatest passion lies? Would it be in -- in writing or in music or have you stoked a new passion for writing?

>> Well, you know, I -- I never thought about writing, but I really enjoyed the process and, you know, I wrote -- during the whole Idol season, I would take a time -- I'd set aside a time every Thursday for about four hours, I would sit down and write and I think that that kind of -- of plan really worked for me to continue to work and, you know -- so I would love to be able to develop my writing skills and be able to share more of -- of my life and my stories with -- and in the hopes that it would, you know, help -- help someone else who is trying to figure some of these things out, as well.

>> I think something that's common for a lot of authors is writer's block. Did you ever experience that?

>> You know, because of the manner in which I wrote, I -- I would write - - I would find subject matter that I thought was relevant and I would talk into a tape player and have that transcribed. And then later, go back and edit. So it was a different process for me. So it was a continual talking into this tape player and just kind of purging my thoughts and feelings on -- on arrogance, on can't get what you want, maybe you're not ready for it. And so, I had these titles that I wanted to talk about how I thought they were relevant to -- to everyone, not just music, but to everyone because sometimes it's really frustrating

when you can't get what you want and you can't figure out why you -- why -- why you're -- why is it that you don't get this promotion or this raise or this job position that you interviewed for. And -- and just because you want it is not enough. A lot of people think, well I really want it bad, I really want it, you know? And it may not be for you or you may not be ready for it.

>> Who are some of your own favorite authors?

>> Oh, you know, I -- in my college years and in my travels, I love espionage and the -- the more mystery type books. I was a big Stephen King reader early on and then I love James Patterson, Robert [inaudible] and so, I loved the -- the kind of behind the scenes -- I love -- but I especially love autobiographies. You know, because I always find it fascinating, someone's journey. So -- and reading JFK -- a lot of musicians of course, Miles Davis and Quincy Jones and Louie Armstrong, [inaudible] -- reading those autobiographies. But I -- I, you know, I love reading a lot of -- a lot of the -- the authors and their perspective on life, you know, and their autobiographies. So, I love autobiographies.

>> Well, one -- one of our other podcasts is actually James Patterson, so hopefully we -- you can give that a listen when we get that one put on.

>> So I shall, I shall.

>> What -- what do you think is maybe the single most important or -- or the top I guess, pieces of advice that you could give young people who wanted to follow in your own footsteps whether musically, or in the [inaudible] world.

>> Yeah, I would say, you know, that the -- the key is to identify your passion and that's going to come with some [inaudible]. You have to try different things and never -- never consider -- always consider everything to be an option. There -- there's nothing that's -- that shouldn't be in front of you for your consideration. And once you identify that, then seek out the professionals who are doing what it is that you want to do. And really demonstrate your commitment to excellence whatever -- whatever that skill is. And then, go about the task of doing it; commit yourself to doing it.

>> Well, Mr. Minor, before I let you go, I do want to ask you what's next for you. What's on the horizon? I know that American Idol is gearing up right now, but anything else you'd care to talk about?

>> Yeah, I -- I'm working on the United Negro College Fund tribute to Lionel Richie on September 12 and that'll be aired on NBC and I'm doing -- I'm executive producer of the VH1 Divas Live.

>> Oh, really?

>> And that'll -- that'll be on VH1 September 17 with several divas -- Jordan Sparks, Kelly Clarkson, Adele, Leona Lewis and we have a special guest that hasn't been announced yet.

>> Okay.

>> And -- and these women will perform songs with other legendary artists such as Melissa Etheridge, Sheryl Crow and -- and so we're going to do some pairings of, you know, with the artist and -- and people that -- that they admire. So, it'll be a great show and some behind the scenes stuff. So look for that and also, I'm nominated again this year for an Emmy for --

>> Perfect.

>> -- for the Grammys, so that'll -- will be announced September 12, so we're hoping we can change that introduction from Emmy nominated to Emmy award winning.

>> I love it when people are nominated for an award for another award show. You have to love that.

>> Yeah, yeah. Well, it's the -- it's the only way. It's the only way to get -- get nominated for the Emmy awards, for -- for outstanding music direction in television.

>> Well, I think that's great and congratulations and thank you very much for your time today.

>> All right, thank you.

>> The book is There's No Traffic on the Extra Mile and we'll be excited to hear more from Ricky Minor at the 2009 National Book Festival on Saturday, September 26. It's on the National Mall from 10:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. The event is free and open to the public. And for more details and a complete list of participating authors, you can visit www.LOC.gov/bookfest. From the Library of Congress, this is Matt Raymond. Thank you very much for listening.