

New York state of mind

PHS grad learning how to make it as a musician

CASEY AGUILAR & MARI JARAMILLO
PROWLER REPORTERS

Sylvester Onyejiaka was living in New York, selling rugs eight hours a day at Macy's and struggling to jumpstart his musical career. Any spare time he had—even his lunch break—was spent practicing his saxophone and going to gigs. To his surprise, it was at one of these gigs that he reconnected with an old friend. Together, they began recording music that eventually caught the attention of Prince on YouTube.

"And the next thing I know, I'm touring the world," said Onyejiaka, a 2004 PHS grad. "I had many different ideas about how my career would go, but that wasn't one of them."

Onyejiaka, a 28-year-old jazz musician, composer, and producer living in New York, got hooked on music at an early age.

"I always liked musical-type movies, all those Disney cartoons," Onyejiaka said. "My favorite part was always the songs."

Onyejiaka started out playing the saxophone in the seventh grade band. Some of his fondest high school memories center around the PHS band.

"The whole program, the underlying theme of it was the letter 'P' on your hat stands for Pflugerville, but it also stands for pride. Whatever it is you're doing, do it to the fullest," Onyejiaka said.

Onyejiaka was known for being responsible with his academics, expressive of his love of music and generally well-liked.



"I remember Sylvester being very inquisitive when it came to music; he had lots of questions," band director O.D. Wilson said. "I remember him being a lover of jazz and hip-hop but also embracing his academics and just being a really good student. He didn't have a leadership position [in band], but he was looked up to and pretty much adored by everyone."

After graduating from the University of North Texas, Onyejiaka spent four months working on a cruise ship to save enough money to move to New York, where his biggest adjustment was learning how to make it as a musician.

"There's no prescribed method," Onyejiaka said. "There's no direct path. You just kind of go out and meet people and try to make it happen."

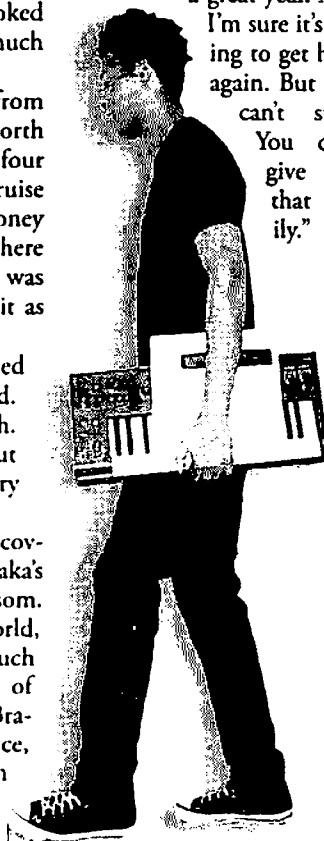
Once he was discovered by Prince, Onyejiaka's career began to blossom. He has traveled the world, performing in places such as the island country of Curacao, Colombia, Brazil, Switzerland, France, Thailand and Japan. In addition to Prince, Onyejiaka has also worked with artists

such as Taylor Swift, 50 Cent, Jennifer Hudson and Janelle Monae.

"[Prince] was very difficult to work with sometimes, but I learned the most from him because he expected so much from us all the time," Onyejiaka said. "He's a musical genius, so just being able to be exposed to that, I hope a little bit of it rubbed off [on me]."

One day, Onyejiaka plans to tour the world under his own name.

"In your mind, you've got to make up what it is you want to do, and you can't let anything get in your way," Onyejiaka said. "It's been hard before for me, and it's been really, really good. This past year was a great year. And I'm sure it's going to get hard again. But you can't stop. You can't give up that easily."



—Photos provided by Sylvester Onyejiaka