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PHOTO BY JOANNE ZUHL

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the blur of the twirling, expandable rainbow ball.

"They tried to cut me and it hit my jawbone, so it was a very shallow cut. It was bloody, and so on," he says. "So, I'm fighting for my life, I knock the guy down. Walk to the hospital. Took off my shirt and wrapped it around my throat to stop the bleeding. I fainted in the emergency room, I woke up with a tube in my throat, I had to relearn how to speak. After that, I made sure I knew how to use a knife, a gun, any weapon you can name. Next time, it's not going to be me going to the hospital. That's what I made the panhandlers know. They harass me."

A bus driver taps his horn as he passes. Reeves waves in appreciation.

"The bus drivers, they love me. The taxi drivers, they love me. Down over there is the police memorial, and for a few times I have played Taps, and I didn't realize how much the police love me. ... The police don't have any problems with me at all because I played Taps for them — I'll play it right now."

He blows Taps as an SUV inches on the on-ramp and pulls up alongside. "I'm not dead yet!" the driver says, leaning out the window, smiling and reaching to shake Reeve's hand.

"Hellooo!"

"He's a regular," Reeves says.

But not everybody loves him. And they're equally expressive.

"You're blocking visibility, man," an

eastbound cyclist says, not angrily, rather, more informative.

He's been the target of some complaints by cyclists and motorists who say he is in the way of each as they navigate a congested area of the bridge. He's been playing at the Hawthorne Bridge entrance for two and a half years, and yes, he says, he's seen accidents. He doesn't think he's caused them. In fact, he thinks that because motorists have to notice him, have to slow down around him, they're more cautious. And there's the other people — the people who come up to him and tell him they were considering suicide until they saw him there, he says. And the people in jail, who can see him from their cells two blocks away. He says people who were inside told him that his presence kept them from despair.

"I don't think fate or God or whatever you believe in, works that way. If by being here, I'm saving lives, I don't think I'm going to hurt anyone."

In a past life, Reeves was a computer nerd. Computers by trade and a nerd by his own description — a bona fide suspenders-and-beanie-cap wearer. He had moved from Boston to Portland in 1991, figuring "I had the choice of either freezing or starving, and I chose Portland, because I figured I might starve, but I won't freeze." But as the turn of the new century grew nearer, he wanted out. Y2K and all that, he says.

"I needed something that did not depend on computers, that did not depend on electronic anything, it just depended on

me."

The cornet he plays today is one of several he owns, the first being a garage sale find that at the moment of purchase made him want to be a trumpet player. Not just any trumpet player, but a master of the refined and under-appreciated art of cartoon music.

Of course, this part of his story wouldn't be complete without at least a few bars to the "Looney Tunes/Merry Melodies" theme, and he delivers, capped with a flourish of the slide whistle.

His computer days were over — they were for a lot of folks. And the 1990s were not kind to amateur musicians, either. What decade is, for that matter, even in the cartoon trade. Then, in 1999, he spent 10 days in a diabetic coma. He says he was told that even while he was unconscious, he was playing his horn. Not well, he says, but playing.

"I was trying to pick up the nurses," he says. "If that ain't a trumpet player, I don't know what is!"

The white tuxedo is an homage to Cab Calloway, an inspiration to Reeves after a chance encounter with Wynton Marsalis, who told him that if he wanted to meet the ladies, he had to be a better dresser. Lose the suspenders and checkered shirts. He found 20 white tuxedos on eBay and bought them for \$15 each (including shipping and handling, he notes). The one he's wearing today is held together at the seams by staples, draped over suspenders and a checkered shirt.

Then one day he wore the Mickey Mouse hat. "The moment I started wearing the

Mickey Mouse hat, I couldn't stop. People get real, real upset if I don't wear the Mickey Mouse hat!

He's 53 now, and doesn't own a car. He buses around town, hauling his equipment in his cart, to several stations throughout the city. I ask if he has any other source of income.

"I make my living as a trumpet player," he answers, chin held high, seated center stage on his own raised platform, with the late afternoon sun for a spotlight.

For four years, Reeves's produced a variety show through Portland Community Media. The show is no longer in production, but that's allowed him more time to focus on his movie. It's working title is "Ever Have One of Those Days?" about a family that has "the worst day imaginable!" Reeves says. He's working on getting funding, following a business plan that ends with figuring out how to make money on the effort.

"Hello! Hello! Yeah! Hello! Woo hoo hoo."

"I want to do a movie, because I grew up very poor and lonely," he says. "And I want to become rich and famous!"

"I want to do a movie because that seems to be where my talents are. When I grew up in Boston, I wanted to be the great black writer from the ghetto. I have about four unpublished novels. The first novel was about the street. The second was about drugs. The third was about prostitution. Fourth novel, well, I don't want to get into that..."

"Hello! Hello!..."

Reeves has no family here in Portland. His parents are dead and his two sisters and their children live in Boston. He had a brother.

"I was close to my brother because we were both dreamers. I wanted to be a writer and he wanted to write plays. He was getting started but he got killed in an auto accident. And I miss him. When I moved from Boston to Portland, I had lots of manuscripts and I had lots of dreams and I thought I would have to abandon them. But because of my brother, he kept them for me and sent them to me when I was ready. He kept my dreams alive. He was one of the few people in the rough ghetto that I grew up in who did things like that. He died when he was 39. Most of the men I know from the ghetto are dead."

Reeves won't say how much he makes on his perch, out of a validated fear of being robbed. People will kill you for a dime, he says, and he's gone to bed tired and hungry after having his day's earnings jacked.

"This is what I've determined. This is a violent place. I cannot do anything about that, but if I can make one person smile, no matter how I do it, I have made the world a little better place for that day."

Reeves' public profile has landed him some wedding gigs, from "people who want to get married real fast." In between, he keeps blasting out the favorites, "Over the Rainbow," and the "Star Wars" theme.

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For his own ears, it's Rodgers and Hammerstein's "In My Own Little Corner."

"I like the song because no matter what, I can be something great."

And he'll sing you few bars if you ask, or even if you don't.

In my own little corner in my own little chair

I can be whatever I want to be.

On the wings of my fancy I can fly anywhere and the world will open its arms to me.