

Remembering James Phillips

The Pacific Northwest lost one of its musical voices on Valentine's Day, with the passing of musician and educator **James Phillips**. The Texas-born saxophone player spent the last two years of his life battling metastatic melanoma while working as a grade school principal in the suburbs of Portland. Though well-known as a teacher, music fans will more likely recall him as an early member of the **Cherry Poppin' Daddies**.

In 1988, when the Daddies formed, swing music was the farthest thing from cool, but Phillips helped sculpt jazzy horn lines on records like *Ferociously Stoned* that flipped a middle finger at the growing commercialization of the I-5 corridor's rock scene. Dana Heitman, trumpeter for the band, told me "James contributed immensely to the personality of the band ... He established that horns could and should rock as hard as the guitar and drums." I first saw Phillips perform at WOW Hall, circa 1989, when the Daddies would pack venues and put on shows that I can only describe as gonzo punk-art theater (full disclosure: I became a member of the band a few years later, and logged many hours touring and playing with James around 1995-6). I remember eight stellar musicians backed by a surrealist light show, in rooms that threatened to buckle from the inertia of volume and sweating bodies. Phillips was an integral part of the whole wild aesthetic, playing blazing saxophone runs while dressed in bright colors. His style referenced jazz, funk and punk rock.

Eventually Phillips opted to make teaching his priority, having earned a master's degree at the University of Oregon. After a series of public school gigs he found a home at Sandy Grade School in 2007, where he was much loved by students, parents and fellow teachers. In an era filled with layoffs and budget cuts in our public schools, Phillips was a great example of how an educator can introduce students to living art. His obituary in the Sandy Post is enlightening more so for the comments it generated than for the article itself. Patti Hardy, parent of a student at Cottage Grove Middle School where Phillips once taught, posted, "You have left your legacy in my children. The music and passion you inspired in them continues to live on today." Heitman echoed the sentiments mentioned above, saying that Phillips' "truest legacy ... would be all the lives he touched as an educator, and as a principal." A large banner, displayed at his life celebration on the grounds of the Sandy school, proclaimed his motto: "Have a great day or not, the choice is yours." – *Jason Moss*



New-Old Tuvan Music

Over the years, Eugene has played host to a few different Tuvan throat singing groups, including **Alash Ensemble**, who last performed here with Bela Fleck at the Shedd in November of 2010. They're back, this time on their own at WOW Hall.

Tuvan throat singing is hauntingly beautiful, and equally hard to explain to those who have never heard the singing technique before. The way most people sing creates just one pitch. Throat singing, or overtone singing, allows one singer to create two, three or even four distinct pitches at the same time. A skilled throat singer can hold a sustained note while humming a higher melody and a lower tone all at once. Now imagine a chorus of people singing in this way, and you can come close to understanding the stunning sounds created by throat singing groups. Tuvan singers often accompany themselves on decorative stringed instruments called *doshpuluur* or *chanzy* which can be plucked as banjos or played with a bow as a cello.

The tradition arose in the tiny republic of Tuva, at the southern edge of Siberia, among the nomadic herdsman of central Asia. Alash Ensemble have embraced Western musical traditions more so than other Tuvan groups; though the four members have been steeped in traditional Tuvan music since childhood, they also might incorporate Western instruments or contemporary harmonies and song forms. Their collaborations with Fleck on his 2008 holiday album *Jingle All The Way* and legendary jazz band Sun Ra Arkestra are examples of their diverse twists on such traditional music.

On their own, they sing songs about women and love, the power and pride of horsemanship, and the desolate beauty of Tuvan landscapes. Though their music is inspired by nature, it is indeed otherworldly.

Alash Ensemble plays at 8 pm Sunday, May 1, at WOW Hall; \$13 adv., \$15 door. – *Vanessa Salvia*

Queen of the Ivory Keys

It is said that **Gabriela Montero** began playing piano at age 0. That is, she was just seven months old when she first laid her finger on a key and by eighteen months she'd already learned to play the National Anthem of Venezuela – her country of origin. Montero's forte is, undoubtedly, improvisation – a talent that she supplements with an unbelievable ear for music. She can improvise around the structure of anything from piano masterpieces such as Rachmaninoff's "Third Piano Concerto" and Chopin's "Nocturne in C minor," to standards like "Happy Birthday" and "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star." It's this skill that truly separates her as one of the greatest and most versatile classical pianists of our time.

Montero has charm, elegance and grace both in her playing and the way she carries herself. She can effectively pull an audience into the experience of classical piano while maintaining the poise of a truly great show-woman. Montero's Jaqua Concert Hall performance will be a solo recital to back the release of her 2010 recording *Solatino*. The album itself is a collection of Latin American compositions taken in by Montero and made all her own. In a recent interview about the collection, Montero described the recording process as "a voyage of who we are and what we're made of, and the way that we express ourselves."

Gabriela Montero will play at 7:30 pm Friday, April 29, at the Jaqua Concert Hall; \$12-\$36. – *Andy Valentine*



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