



KARI BORGEN
Publisher

JIM VAN NOSTRAND
Editor

JEREMY FELDMAN
Circulation Manager

DEBRA BLOOM
Business Manager

JOHN D. BRUIJN
Production Manager

CARL EARL
Systems Manager

OUR VIEW

Re-enactment fulfilled valuable mission

In considering what to think about Civil War re-enactments at Fort Stevens State Park, it’s worth reading Tony Horwitz’s 1998 nonfiction book “Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War.”

Insightful and at times amusing, it’s an account of the author’s extensive efforts to document the active 1990s subculture built around recreating the experiences of ancestors who fought in America’s grotesquely bloody 1861-65 conflict.

Re-enactors then — and probably now — are the first to admit that theirs is an eccentric passion. It costs a lot of money and effort to do it well, with hardcore participants spending thousands on historically accurate clothing and gear, devoting much of their leisure time to preparing for and attending events.

Although predominantly an activity for white males, Horwitz found little indication that re-enacting the war to end slavery was based on racial prejudice or a desire to turn back the clock to the slavery-premised Antebellum South. It was instead grounded in nostalgia about the individual heroism of Union and Confederate ancestors, along with affection for what amount to historically accurate camping trips — sort of elaborate games of tag for grown-ups.

Twenty years since Horwitz’s book was published, many re-enactors have aged out, while younger generations find participation too demanding on their schedules and wallets. And yet the annual Civil War re-enactment at Fort Stevens State Park has continued, drawing up to 800 entrants and large



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

A Civil War re-enactment held at Fort Stevens State Park for 27 years will relocate.

audiences. Unlike the South, which has many such events, the one at Fort Stevens is essentially the only show within hundreds of miles.

Here in the far West, the Civil War primarily consisted of a Confederate warship preying on Yankee whalers. But the Fort Stevens event provides participants and spectators with a sense of what ground conflict might have looked like, had it extended to this coast. A good case may be made that it fulfills a valuable mission by attracting the interest of Americans who otherwise often have a hard time engaging with our own history.

In the wake of controversies over Confederate battle flag and statues,

references to the Confederacy have become freighted with political and cultural subtexts. For some — as demonstrated by the furor over a 2017 Astoria Regatta parade float — any display of Confederate symbols is a potential endorsement of contemptible white supremacist views. Others appear to sincerely see them either as an affectionate nod to Southern and rural life, or as an appropriate expression of First Amendment rights and rejection of heavy-handed political correctness.

Considering this minefield, park officials could hardly be blamed for nudging the Fort Stevens event into making other arrangements, or at least fully absorbing all its costs. The last thing

a state agency wants is national news coverage for subsidizing re-enactments some see as celebrating a tarnished, racist past.

Although the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department hasn’t publicly explained its actions, it’s also plausible that officials saw little benefit from tying up one of its major assets on a late-summer weekend when it can count on being fully booked with paying guests.

It’s not what Horwitz had in mind, but his subtitle referring to the unfinished Civil War is more apt now than ever. These issues continue to reverberate from coast to coast. They’re not going away, regardless of whether re-enactments cease at Fort Stevens.

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

The Flying Eagle

Are you familiar with the saxophonist Jim Pepper?” Cannon Beach artist, guru and former jazz drummer Rex Amos quizzed. Amos knows I toot around on the horn.

“I’m familiar with Art Pepper,” I said, referring to the renowned alto player, with Chet Baker and Shelly Manne among the founders of the West Coast jazz scene.

But he meant Jim Pepper — “The Flying Eagle.”

From Kaw-Muscogee Native American roots — his grandfather was a ceremonial leader — Pepper’s remarkable career resulted in 50 recordings as bandleader, artist and composer. Pepper was equally at home with the Native American community, Portland city scene and international jazz avant



R.J. MARX

garde. “Witchi-Tai To” was released on “Pepper’s Pow Wow” in 1969, when Pepper was 28, and is the only hit to feature an authentic Native American chant in the history of the Billboard pop charts.

As a teenager Pepper performed at jazz clubs in Portland, soon moving into the upper tier of jazz players.

He joined Free Spirits in 1966, the group musicologists call the first jazz-rock fusion band. You can hear them on the internet — stylized sitar and blue-eyed soul harmonies revolutionary at the time, complemented by Pepper’s voice on flute and saxophone, a shout-out to the universe.

“They were so different that no one knew what to do with them,” Eastern Washington-based saxophone player Barry “River” Bergstrom recalled.

Original sound

Bergstrom “discovered” the music of Jim Pepper in the mid-1970s.

“One day I attended a concert by Tom Grant and his band,” Bergstrom said, referring to the renowned Portland jazz pianist. “They didn’t have a saxophonist with them, but there was one particular



Upstream Productions

In this undated photo, saxophonist Jim Pepper is shown performing in the film ‘Pepper’s Pow Wow’ in Portland.

song that really resonated with me.”

The song was “Witchi-Tai To.”

“I knew I had never heard it before,” Bergstrom said. “After the concert I was talking with Tom and the guys and asked what that tune was. They all laughed and said, ‘Oh that’s a song by an Indian guy from Portland.’”

“Witchi-Tai To” was the beginning of his journey; Bergstrom felt Pepper’s music gave his life purpose. He transcribed by ear everything he could find of Pepper’s and talked to anyone who knew anything about him.

“It became a very self-affirming thing for me,” Bergstrom said. “Jim and his music were coming from a very deep emotional place.”

Horn players strived to capture Pepper’s sound by playing the same type of horn he played, Bergstrom said.

And what a sound — described by one writer as a “splintered, congested wail” climbing into the stratosphere.

Though he immersed himself in Pepper’s sound, Bergstrom believes Pepper’s message is one of finding your own voice. “Jim would be the first to say to them: ‘Don’t sound like me! Sound like you!’ I mean, how could you do anything else?”

Proclamation

Sean Aaron Cruz bought the Pepper family home in suburban Parkrose in



AP Photo/Greg Wahl-Stephens

Dennis Springer, left, and Glen Moore perform during a 2005 concert in remembrance of the music of Jim Pepper.

2002, 10 years after Jim Pepper’s death from cancer in 1992.

Cruz had no idea who had owned it before him until Pepper’s mother, Floy Pepper, and sister, Suzie Pepper Henry, asked if they could see their former home. He agreed, and as they left, they presented Cruz with a CD of “Pepper’s Pow Wow.”

A longtime jazz fan, the music transported Cruz back to a 1970 concert in Santa Rosa, California.

Guitarist Larry Coryell was opening for headliner rock ’n’ roller Chuck Berry. “Everybody was there for Chuck Berry,” Cruz said. “I was there for Coryell.”

Cruz was the only person clapping, he recalled, amid a restless audience waiting for Berry’s “Johnnie B. Goode” and “Roll Over Beethoven.”

“Then Coryell says to the audience, ‘I want to introduce my tenor saxophone player — he’s a real Indian.’”

That’s when the magic happened, Cruz recalled. “Pepper started to play and he changed the room. The audience was singing, they were dancing on their chairs — he was monumental! And he sounded like nobody I’d ever heard before.”

In 2005, Cruz served as Oregon State Sen. Avel Gordly’s chief of staff. Gordly, the first African-American elected to the Oregon Senate, was so inspired by Pepper’s achievements she asked Cruz to

draft a proclamation honoring Pepper. “I knew this music was important in a musical sense,” Cruz said.

In years to come, Cruz organized the Jim Pepper Native Arts Festival, a yearly event, including the 2013 concert which brought together original members of Free Spirits.

Cruz intends to help keep Pepper’s legacy alive. An annual festival will return to Parkrose in September with the theme “Making the Visible Visible.”

“There’s a lot of timeless music and it’s got to get out,” Cruz said. “That’s the mission I’m on. I promised Jim’s mom to do everything make sure Jim got the recognition he deserved.”

Bergstrom tells of the time the jazz trumpet player Don Cherry took Pepper to Africa for the first time. “The people there were really struck by Jim’s music,” Bergstrom said. “They said that it was the ‘most American’ music that they had every heard. It almost gives me chills when I say that. Because think about it — an American Indian, or Native or whatever — is taking songs he learned from his grandfather and jazz harmonies he had accumulated over the years. How much more American could any music be?”

R.J. Marx is The Daily Astorian’s South County reporter and editor of the Seaside Signal and Cannon Beach Gazette.