

INSPIRED BY 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 garde. “Witchi-Tai To” released on “Pepper’s Pow Wow” in 1969, when Pepper was 28, 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 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



FILE PHOTO

“Pepper’s Pow Wow,” the album that introduced the song “Witchi-Tai To.”

CANNON SHOTS

R.J. MARX



HOW MUCH MORE AMERICAN COULD ANY MUSIC BE?™

in 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 musicological



FAMILY OF JIM PEPPER

Jim Pepper

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?”

Binoculars at the ready for spring birding

Hello again dear readers and fellow birders! After what has felt like a lengthy bit of time, I am once again willing and able to assemble stories about our feathered friends. The timing couldn’t be better as the daylight gets longer!

It’s going to be an exciting bird year for me, as I have decided to once again get out as often as I can, often neglecting chores and family, to see as many birds as I can! I don’t like to use the common catch phrase, “big year” as that denotes an attempt to minimize birds as a number on a list and to compete against a previous year of birding.

In the past, this had been a part of my competitive nature which is now giving way to a more gentle approach. I recently came upon a line from Thoreau’s writings in regards to scheduling. It read: “I love a broad margin to my life.” This means so much more to me than having time between appointments. I am making an attempt

BIRD NOTES

SUSAN PETERSON



to pause, to look and actually see the birds, their behaviors, the habitat and wonders of this beautiful planet. (We will see if I can hold onto that throughout the year!) Maybe I’ll name it a “get out there year.”

So I wish you good fortune, hoping that you too will have a year of enjoying the beauty of this amazing part of the world and maybe you’ll see some birds!

Upcoming birding events

Plan to attend the Necanicum Bird Day on April 7 at the Bob Chisholm Center in Seaside and then the Annual Birdathon Fundraiser for the Wildlife Center of the North Coast on April 14.

Find all the details at the Wildlife Center’s website at coastwildlife.org.

Right after that, we’ll be celebrating more outdoor adventures with Cannon Beach’s unique 12 Days of Earth Day, including lectures, plantings, clean-ups and a parade and street fair. Watch for details coming soon!

And don’t forget the First Sunday Cannon Beach Bird Walk. The next one will be on March 4. Join a small group at 9 a.m. at the Lagoon Trail on Second Street. Bring binoculars and wear appropriate clothing. Everyone is welcome!

Susan has spent her life enjoying the great outdoors from the lakes and woods of northern Minnesota, Mount Adams in Washington and now the Oregon beach environs. After spending many pleasurable hours driving her avid birder parents around, she has taken up birding as a passion. Susan resides on Neawanna Creek in Seaside where her backyard is a birder’s paradise.

Read any great books lately?

What to do on a wet gray day? Drink coffee. Read a book.

A lot of people say what they like most about winter is how the gray weather affords more opportunities to read. My book group is reading “The Other Alcott,” a novel by Elise Hooper, a literary fiction based on the life of May Alcott, Louisa May Alcott’s baby sister. In real life and the novel, May chafes at how she’s been portrayed in her sister’s first book, “Little Women,” a novel based on the real life Alcott sisters. To make matters worse, while the novel itself is deemed a success, May’s illustrations for the novel are met with critical ridicule. May, a trained artist who studied with painting masters in Boston and then Europe, revolts against living under her more successful sister’s thumb, the most difficult issue being that it’s Louisa who provides most of the financial support for her younger sister’s art career. If it weren’t for book group, I’d never have read the book, but I found myself drawn in, even though as a child I despised “Little Women.”

As soon as I put it down, however, I plunged into a copy of James Joyce’s “The Dubliners” I took out of the library. While I am very fond of all the bookstores in the immediate area, there’s only so many books I can buy. I picked it up because not long ago I was having a conversation in a coffee shop with a man who said he’d always planned on reading James Joyce, but being a slow reader, he felt put off by the length and depth of “Ulysses”; “Finneg-an’s Wake” was out of the question. He remembered reading something by Joyce at his prep school in ninth grade, but he couldn’t remember the name.

“Most likely it was ‘Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,’” I volunteered. “Many people read that in ninth or 10th grade.”

I suggested if he wanted to read something quintessentially Joyce that would only take a few days, he try “The Dead,” a story Joyce published in 1914. It’s the final story, almost a novella, in the collection called “The Dubliners.” The story takes place almost entirely at a holiday party in Dublin hosted at the home of a pair of middle class spinsters and their grown niece who lives with them. The party is a musicale with singers and dancing and there is a special guest, a tenor who has sung on a London stage. The spinsters’ nephew, Gabriel Conroy, arrives late with his wife Gretta. A frisson of tension rears its head between Conroy and a female guest who accuses Conroy of not being Irish enough and supporting the English political control of Ireland. Conroy, discomfited, is already anxious about a speech and toast he’s promised to give. But what spoils the evening for him entirely is learning by night’s end about a young man named Michael Furey, long dead, who still captures his wife’s heart and romantic imagination. Before this evening, he never knew of the young man. My favorite part of the story, however, isn’t this part. What I love most is a short section that takes place by the front door just as the party is breaking up.

“Good-night, Mr. D’Arcy. Good-night, Miss O’Callaghan.”

“Good-night, Miss Morkan.”

“Good-night, again.”

“Good-night, all. Safe home.”

“Good-night. Good night.”

I was ruminating on the sonorous beauty of Joyce’s prose I sat nursing a coffee at Sleepy Monk in Cannon Beach. It was a drizzly afternoon, and chilly. I thought about how coastal Ireland probably doesn’t look or feel much different from Oregon’s north coast. The winter weather is much the same: rain, rain, and more rain. I thought about my friend, the former Lady Self, who I met in Bedford, New York, over a decade ago, not long before she married an Englishman who was in the House of Lords. He owned a small castle on the Irish coast. The marriage didn’t last and she had to relinquish the title, although I believe she got the house. I imagined how, like me, she might be passing a little time on a late February afternoon in a charming café, eyeing a cheddar-and-bacon scone or a molasses cookie before regretfully thinking of her waistline, saying, “That will just be coffee (or tea), please.”

VIEW FROM THE PORCH

EVE MARX



EVE MARX/FOR CANNON BEACH GAZETTE

If the rain keeps up, try “Ulysses.”

LETTERS

On dune grading at Breakers Point

After considering both sides of the dune-grading issue, as a Breakers Point neighbor since its inception, my recommendation is for denial or, at most, the minimum. Taking into account the wisdom of “the greatest happiness for the greatest number” it becomes obvious that “the greatest number” is composed of those citizens of the state of Oregon and tourists from all over the world who find “the greatest happiness” in the ever-changing dunes from Breakers Point to Chapman Point. These people should not be responsible for the “view enhancement” that owners of Breakers Point condominiums believe is owed them. Nor should this majority have any qualms about the possibility that a few Breakers Point owners might find reductions in the value of their condominiums. Individual property rights that conflict with the common good often need to be sacrificed or at the very least compromised.

Rex Amos
Cannon Beach