

Views from the Rock

A Q&A with jazz legend TOM GRANT

Pianist Tom Grant is a long-time leader on the Portland music scene, an award-winning jazz and New Age music star with an international audience. After graduating from the University of Oregon, he traveled to New York City in 1970 with Native American saxophonist Jim Pepper. This led to Grant touring and recording with jazz greats Woody Shaw, Charles Lloyd and Tony Williams before launching into his own decades-long experience as leader, recording artist and mentor. He will be appearing at the Astoria Golf and Country Club on Feb. 2 with singer Shelly Rudolph. We caught up with him at Bill's Tavern in Cannon Beach.

Q: Tell me about growing up in Portland.

Grant: I was born in 1946. My dad's name was Al Grant — his original name was Abraham Goldbaum. He was a drummer and tap dancer in vaudeville. I started on drums and tap-danced a little myself when I was 4 or 5.

My older brother Michael turned me on to all the hip s**t, like Miles, Coltrane, Thelonious Monk, Horace Silver, so I listened to all that stuff too. We both took lessons from the same person, Gene Confer. He was "the" guy in Portland for jazz piano. I loved him. He'd sit there and write out a chart for you as fast as you and I were writing a letter — melody, chords, the whole thing.

Q: Your dad, Al Grant, owned Madrona's, a very famous record store in Portland.

Grant: His record store was heavily into R&B and jazz. It was "the place." For the time it was in existence, from 1950 to 1964, it was the main place to get jazz and R&B in Oregon and beyond. It was a scene. People danced in the store.

When I was 12 years old, I took the bus downtown from Northeast Portland. I'd go to a sci-fi movie, always knowing I'd go to my dad's store and get a ride home.

Q: When did you start playing jazz?

Grant: I went to Grant High School in Portland. No relation. (laughs). As I recall, we didn't have a jazz band, so everything I did was outside the high school thing.

My brother Michael and (saxophonist) Jim Pepper were friends.

CANNON SHOTS

R.J. MARX



That's how I got to know Pepper. My first gig was at a place called Cafe Espresso.

Q: Did your brother pursue music?

Grant: My brother was one of the original Hare Krishnas. He wasn't just a follower. In the summer of love, 1967, he brought the Hare Krishna movement out to San Francisco, then to L.A., and then to London, where he befriended the Beatles with this spiritual message. George Harrison was the only one that stayed with it. He was always considered a Hare Krishna devotee.

Q: Were you interested in the Hare Krishna movement?

Grant: I was ambivalent, but I wasn't really into it. There were a lot of things about it I didn't like.

Q: Did you go to college?

Grant: I studied political science at the University of Oregon. I left Portland in 1969 for L.A. to be in a pop band called "Mercy." Then there was another band called Mercy that had a big hit, so we had to forget that name. Then I came back, finished school, finished college, got my degree, got a masters. I taught political science and social studies.

Q: You taught school?

Grant: I did a lot of teaching in the '70s, I had my own classes in a small town in Oregon, Mill City, then I came up to Portland, and substituted in the days, and then at night I was playing with Jim Pepper, and then with my own band.

Q: You played with the great jazz drummer Tony Williams. How did that experience influence you?

Grant: I was very much influenced by the Tony Williams Experience. He could rock with the best of them. Everything was possible and nothing was impossible. He taught me you didn't need to be locked in a style. "Don't box yourself in." When I got the call to play with him, I nearly died.

Q: What was your first breakthrough as a leader?

Grant: In the '70s, I established my band in Portland, "Tom



Owen Carey

Tom Grant celebrates his award-winning album "Sipping Beauty."



Addie Mannan

Tom Grant and Shelly Rudolph appear at the Astoria Country Club on Feb. 2.

Grant and Friends." We played fusion music. I had a record in 1983, "Tom Grant," that got a bunch of airplay. It charted. I was playing electric (piano), then synthesizer, but the acoustic piano was my sound. Ironically, when I toured with Tony, he hated me playing acoustic piano. His complaint was he couldn't hear it.

This was before there was an expression "smooth jazz." My subsequent records did pretty well.

Q: Did you continue to teach social studies?

Grant: (Portland drummer) Ron Steen was a big influence on my whole career. He talked me into leaving teaching high school and coming up to Portland to play. e nurtures young players like crazy. (Bassist) Esperanza Spaulding — I give him all the credit for nurturing her career. (Trumpeter) Chris Botti is another Ron Steen protege. Chris is originally from Corvallis. He did all his growing up playing jam sessions under the tutelage of Ron Steen.

Q: When did your music begin to be associated with the "smooth jazz" genre?

Grant: Toward the late '80s,

early '90s, they started using the expression smooth jazz. I was "Mr. Smooth Jazz" for awhile. I hated that. I never like to be boxed in. So I've been fighting it — to my detriment.

The 2000s were when I was trying to regain my status in the smooth jazz world. I think I was regretting the fact that I had thumbed my nose at the smooth jazz world.

Q: You won an award in 2017 for your album "Sipping Beauty." Zone Music Reporter, a website tracking New Age, world, and instrumental music gave it best album for the "chill-groove" genre.

Grant: My last two records were New Age-y relaxation records. They did pretty well.

Q: Do you have a family?

Grant: I have one child, 49, with two grand-kids. We're close. I also have a stepdaughter from my second marriage. I'm not married, but I may as well be. Her name is Mary.

Q: Do you continue to tour?

Grant: I was just in Indonesia. One of my records, a bootleg, was a big hit in Indonesia.

Q: Have you played locally?

TOM GRANT IN CONCERT

Tom Grant and vocalist Shelly Rudolph appear at the Astoria Golf and Country Club on Saturday, Feb. 2. Their set highlights an evening of music and fine dining, with an evening opening performance by R.J. Marx and John Orr. For tickets, go to <https://www.astoriagolf.com>.

Grant: I've played at the Coaster Theatre twice, with Shelly Rudolph. We play standards, some of my original stuff. She's cool and great to look at. We're playing at the Astoria Country Club on Feb. 2.

Q: What do you like to do for fun?

Grant: I do conditioning. Hot yoga, bickram — I've done that for 20 years.

Q: How do you see Oregon as a place to nurture jazz talent?

Grant: For years we've had some good big jazz festivals. There's a good program at Portland State University. Several of the community colleges have good established jazz players. Jazz is very respectable around here.

I do a gig every Sunday night in Vancouver (Washington) at a little club there. We're celebrating our 10th year, Tommy O's, it's kind of a Hawaiian-themed place, Tommy is a Hawaiian native, we do a concert, then we do a jam session. Jam sessions are big in Portland.

Q: What's coming up for you?

Grant: Dinner, pretty soon.

Q: What is your advice to younger musicians?

Grant: Get a complete education. Go into law or medicine. (laughs). Follow your heart. Follow your dream.

Cultivating a taste for fine chocolate and macabre humor

Cannon Beach tourist season is year-round

Christmas is over and you'd think I'd had enough, but as I was feeling restless from an abundance of cooking and cleaning, in an effort to amuse me, last week, Mr. Sax, my husband, offered to join me for an hour or so playing tourist. Growing up in an east coast beach town, I know how easy it is for full-time residents to grow impatient, dare I say annoyed, with tourists. Tourist season is a year round thing in Cannon Beach where winter visitors thrill about making the pilgrimage to Haystack Rock during low tide on a windswept winter day before heading back to their cozy vacation rental for a nostalgic evening of board games.

TripSavvy, a tourism guide, advocates winter visitors explore Ecola State Park, hit the city's high quality art galleries, pay a visit to the Cannon Beach History Center and Museum, watch live glass blowing at IceFire Glassworks, or take in a play at the Coaster Theater Playhouse.

My own favorite touristy thing to do in Cannon Beach is enjoy a Parisian-worthy hot chocolate at the Chocolate Café. This place is a gem; if hot chocolate isn't your thing, they make espresso drinks and French-press coffee. The main attraction is chocolate,



A great way to warm the soul in winter.

VIEW FROM THE PORCH

EVE MARX



in particular truffles. The owners have curated a variety of chocolates from around the world. Something they persist in calling a handmade milkshake is so thick and creamy it's indistinguishable from ice cream. Forget the straw; you must eat it with a spoon. The foamy hot chocolate is made from pure chocolate and whole milk. There are no powders, no fillers, and no syrups. It's just milk ... and chocolate.

After slaking my lust for something sweet, Mr. Sax and I wandered into Jupiter's Books on North Spruce Street. While my



Eve Marx

One of the original illustrated novels by author Edward Gorey.

husband conversed with the owner, I browsed the shelves where I discovered an old friend, the illustrated collection of stories called "Amphigorey."

"Amphigorey" was first published in 1972. Collected in one paperback volume, it's actually fifteen macabre short stories written and illustrated by Edward Gorey, an American artist. The stories include "The Unstrung Harp," "The Object Lesson," and "The Curious Sofa," and my own lurid favorite, "The Gashlycrumb Tinies."

"The Gashlycrumb Tinies" was originally published on its own in 1963; it's an illustrated tale of 26 children, each representing a letter of the alphabet, their untimely deaths relayed in rhyming couplet.

"The Gashlycrumb Tinies" is Gorey's most notorious and best known work. Famously reviewed as "a sarcastic rebellion against a sunny, idyllic childhood," the morbid humor is derived from the mundane ways children can perish, such as falling down stairs, drowning, choking on a peach, or, my personal favorite, "B is for Basil assaulted by bears."

In 1973 a college friend named Corey gave me "Amphigorey" as a gift. I lost Corey fourteen years later during the AIDS crisis. My copy of the book mysteriously disappeared from my shelves. I'm pretty sure somebody swiped it.

Happily, thanks to a wonderful used books bookstore, once again, it's mine.



Rex Amos/For Cannon Beach Gazette

The center holds

By REX AMOS
For Cannon Beach Gazette

*Old spirit tree,
I wonder how you
Cling to earth
With roots exposed.
Is your center holding
Fast despite the sea's
Ever-changing attack?
Now surrounded by
Rusted rock, you
Embrace layered logs
Left by the high tide.
Your trunk bleeds
Pitch where lovers
Carved a heart deep
Into your torn bark.
You lean toward
The sea while you
Grasp the land with
One last link to life,
A gnarled, withered
Root tamped deep
Into the soil like
A stick of dynamite
Ready to ex*

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