

IN MEMORY OF WILDA NOVAK

by Carolyn Tokson



Vivian Joiner (left) and Wilda Novak at the August 2019 Jazz Jam. Photo by Norman Vickers.

Wilda Novak had a 200 watt smile that lit up the room. Her dear friend Vivian Joiner always guided Wilda's motorized wheel chair into the Jazz Jams and Gumbos which Wilda so enjoyed. Wilda was a big fan of Joe Occhipinti's saxophone classics and a frequent attendee at Joe's events as well. A graduate of Pensacola High School's class of 1949, Wilda met her piano playing husband Emil "Larry" Novak at the Pensacola USO before he deployed to Korea. They lived in the Chicago area for 35 years. When she returned to Pensacola, Wilda was very active in the Pensacola Museum of Art Guild and served as president and treasurer of the organization. Wilda died July 17, 2020 from COVID-19. We will miss Wilda's smile, presence and enthusiasm.

WE WILL MISS RALPH

by Roger and Kat Villines



Ralph Knowles and his wife, Patricia enjoy the December 2019 Jingle Jazz. Photo by Alice Crann Good.

As you probably know, Ralph Knowles passed away on July 18 at the age of 93. Talk about an avid Jazz Pensacola supporter! He could always be counted on as a hard working volunteer, steadfast financial supporter, enthusiastic

attendee at virtually all events, active leader as a Board member and interested advisor in the Sparks group – Ralph gave his all for Jazz Pensacola for a long time.

When Kat and I moved to Pensacola in 2003, it was Ralph and Janet at the door for our first Jazz Gumbo. They were so friendly and inviting. We were hooked on Jazz Pensacola, and we began a very close friendship with them. We were so sad when Janet passed in 2009, and now Ralph. But hey, 93 is an enviable age to reach, and he led a fantastic life – one to be celebrated as well as missed.

Ralph was a truly kind and good person, and he loved jazz too. He loved that hot traditional jazz, with a toe-tappin' beat, and I think he was warming up to that progressive jazz I presented from time to time. You could always find him in the merchandise tent or the VIP tent or around the Gazebo or at the Jazz Jams and Jazz Gumbos or at the college band concerts or wherever Al Martin was playing. Of course, many more good things can be said about him. Just want to say again – we will miss Ralph. 🎷

WHAT'S JAZZING AROUND TOWN

by Carolyn Tokson

It's not easy trying to set up jazz events. New studies look at the amount of aerosols that are dispersed in vocalizing, playing wind and brass instruments. As a result, it is very difficult for jazz musicians wanting to perform and teachers returning to teach band students in person. The corona virus is requiring a lot of hard decisions in this area. Our president Fred Domulot and the Board of Directors have been working to move forward at a pace that provides safety for all. We appreciate your patience and support in this situation. We look forward to getting together, seeing some of our jazz friends, and listening to a live performance, but we also want to exercise caution and ensure safety. Check out the calendar at www.jazzpensacola.com to see who is performing live jazz and where. Keep your eyes out for a Jazz Alert. We do have events in the works.

Creola Ruffin of the Gulf Coast Ethnic and Heritage Jazz Festival and MOJO (Mystic Order of the Jazz Obsessed) honored Joe Occhipinti in Mobile with a medal for his chairmanship of the event this year. The twenty-two year old festival began with the Marcus Johnson Summer Jazz Camp, which was held outdoors this year, and culminated in three days of virtual performances ending August 1. Joe and his JazzAbouts will continue to be at Calvert's on Tuesday nights for the foreseeable future.

The August issue of The Syncopated Times features an article by Lew Shaw about Dr. Norman Vickers, "Jazz Doc and More" which details the musical life of the founder of

"Jazzing" Continued...

"Jazzing" Continued...

Jazz Pensacola. It has links to the Jazz Pensacola website and information about VARF, the Vickers Artist in Residence Fund. The Sparks volunteer group were in the process of organizing a fundraiser for VARF, an event honoring Norman and Joe O when all activities came to a screeching halt with the coronavirus. It is still in the works and will be held at a time when events can be handled more safely. Those who have an online subscription to the Syncopated Times can also see the refreshed version of the July 2017 edition with many articles by Norman and Lew.

Pianist Al Martin's book "Al's Ten Little Fingers: He used them to play music", a collaboration between Al and Sandra L. Winborne Ph.D, is on sale on Amazon.

With colorful illustrations by local artist, Carter J. Gaston, the story of Al's journey in music comes alive. Another book about Al's adult life is in progress according to Dr. Winborne who heads a local education consultant business called Winnie and Associates, LLC. Sue Straughn of WEAR highlighted Al on "Angels in our Midst" on August 3. Dr. Winborne sang as Al played. Carter J. Gaston is a local artist who painted the murals at the corner of Belmont and Devilliers Sts. He has a studio in Brownsville and is presently showing his work at The Gordon Community Art Center at 306 N. Devilliers. PenArts, Inc. chose Carter J. as their first artist and his work will be on display until August 28. Al's book is an ideal gift for any parent or child interested in music. Lucky listeners are sometimes able to catch Al's soothing piano playing at the District on Friday nights.

Peg Sheridan, Cay Simpson, Barbara Little, Vivian Lamont and Jim Crumlish were among the crowd enjoying the music of saxophonist Jim Andrews at the Cactus Flower. Cynthia Neves Domulot has been performing at the District with Tom Latenser. They are always a class act. The Blues Society of Northwest Florida has had to cancel events also, but they hosted the Regional International Blues Challenge virtually on August 8.

With tickets all but sold out, William "Cadillac" Banks finally cancelled his Gulf Coast Summer Fest Jazz Edition scheduled for September 5 and 6 at Maritime Park. He had a line of award-winning smooth jazz artists and the festival had planned major precautions with temperature checks at the gate and requirements for masks, social distancing, and a limit of only 1500 tickets. I spoke to him only a few days before he cancelled; he said it was a hard decision to balance the concerns and risks.

Time to be grateful for technology. Mike Lynch sent me another musical jewel. It's a step back in time hosted by David Brent Johnson, who brings us two weekly historical jazz programs, Night Lights and Afterglow, on the weekly WFIU from Indiana Public Media. Norman Vickers and a few others report they have been watching Roman Street's live streaming from their Facebook page on Thursday nights at 7:30 CST. Thanks to Carmen Brown of MOJO for her tip to

find live streamed jazz on the Facebook page of the New Orleans Jazz Museum. They offer a concert from the balcony of the museum on Tuesdays at 5PM and a plethora of other jazz events. Also explore offerings from WWOZ 90.7 FM out of New Orleans for streaming on their Facebook page.

Debby Naylor and Marcia Hoven and other friends of the late Carol (Gabby) Barrett planned a celebration of Gabby's life for Sunday, August 20. After a high noon Mass at St. Michael's Basilica, friends were taking a ferry ride, one of Gabby's favorite activities. Other news from our membership finds Holly Parker recuperating nicely from Mohs surgery, but our dear Vivian Lamont began the month with a return stay in the hospital. She is home and happy to receive cards or calls, but no visitors as yet. We wish her a return to her sparkling self.

REMEMBERING DAVID SHELANDER

by Holly Shelton



David Shelander (left) and Holly Shelton.

We had played three consecutive nights and were set to gig again in Destin that night. Dave, as I sometimes called him, had long been my most valued musical partner. I had a house gig at The Perdido Beach Resort for more than 13-years, five-nights weekly that I began with another pianist. I met David, fresh from the Navy, at a Jazz Society (JSOP) Gumbo event at the old Beef and Ale House. I approached him when I knew the other pianist was not going to work out a few months later, after talking and sitting in with him a few times. I was really impressed and knew he was the Rolls Royce of accompanists. Dave had what we musicians like to call, "Big Ears." He never musically ran over me. Always played elegantly, really tasty in support of me. He would lead me to a song I had never heard or perhaps not considered might be right for me. He was, as the requested song we would record, says, "The Wind Beneath My Wings." I hired him, was very lucky he said yes, and the rest was history.

Shelander was tall and slim, well dressed, handsome, and one-talented Texan. Wearing glasses, carrying his Day-Timer notebook, and mechanical pencils, he doodled in, usually on our breaks, he appeared studious. You would

"Shelander" Continued...

not necessarily hear Texas in his voice or manner, but he embodied the space around him. He moved fluidly. He was often intensely private but could be cordial and funny, in the beginning, secluding himself away from people unless we had visitors, fans requesting a visit. He could be very outgoing, especially with a few drinks.

Folks often assumed we were married. As I am 6'1", he was at least 6'5". I never measured, but he was taller than I. Fans confessed they naturally perceived we were married! I like to believe it is because we worked together so cohesively, seamlessly, hardly having to say anything. We almost finished each other's musical sentences and complemented each other in looks as well as talent power.

The resort (hence, our lives) was run by an iron-fisted German Chef, so days off were not easy to come by. It was a cut-throat society among the resort staff from the owners-on-down. It could be very stressful trying to navigate whose side was whose depending on the politics of the day. Still, we had much freedom in that I could sing whatever I felt like. I created the upstairs venue that welcomed and pulled people right in when they came through the revolving doors after 7 p.m. It really was my baby, and Dave later would help me grow it.

He could play anything. We were two-years apart in age, he older, and had a similar uncanny love of blues, rock, jazz, film scores. You name it; we probably played it. Perdido Beach Resort is a Four-Diamond Resort, so we dressed and really put on a show. The hotel drew many visiting dignitaries, families with children, businessmen, women. I wrote special material for businesses, conventions, wedding couples, and happily took requests. Every New Years', the 4th of July, we were there. Asking Chef for the night off for my honeymoon was not even granted, so we worked it around the schedule. The rehearsal dinner was there, of course, with our floor shows directly after! We were well-paid but earned every dollar.

With my theatrical background, I used colorful props; red, purple, and gold boas, jackets, my signature hats, adding to the visual of the character portrayed in the song. I kept my trunk under the piano and unlocked it nightly to set up my show. Kids loved it, and we enjoyed seeing their fun, too. Many guests became more than acquaintances and told us we were the drawing card that drew them back annually. Some still remain friends. We literally watched families' children grow-up, and some even wrote letters. The Perdido Beach Resort was an unusual gig, and we made it what it became. I'm still really proud of that.

Not a day goes by without a thought of David. I mean it. I think sometimes he is there with me. Ours' was often a love-hate relationship with the atmosphere we worked in, not always pleasant. Dave was the most gifted pianist/accompanist I have ever known. He 'grew me.' His artist's command and repertoire, knowledge was endless and seemed effortless.

For instance, our various experiences, from his having played with The Tonight Show Band to my surprise appearance on Johnny Carson, in the '80s, complimented and often weirdly somewhat paralleled each other. I grew up in Memphis, "Home of the Blues." He, in Texas, educated at North Texas State, with everything from rock to steel pedal country, indigenous blues, jazz, and soul. Dave played for Carmen McRae, one of the singers I carefully studied and still adore. He was one of Bonnie Raitt's first-keyboard players and close to Hutch Hutchinson, her bassist, and Bonnie. I had met her and followed her closely while living in Los Angeles. When she played Pensacola, Dave was backstage, and I was in the audience. He worked in the Gap Band. Their song, "You Dropped a Bomb On Me" in the 4th bar and later in the end-part has a whistle like a firecracker sizzling. That's a David synth-lick. He worked from coast to coast, on every continent with so many famous, some obscure, eclectic artists, too numerous to list here.

The "Perdido Beach" CD collaboration came out of so many asking for a CD of ours. Eventually, we would record in Huntsville at a studio belonging to the resort owners. We financed it together ourselves. Toot Snoddy, their house engineer, had put in our state-of-the-art sound system at the resort and was admired by both of us. We were in good hands with him. Stripped-down, piano and vocals, honest music with nothing to hide behind, is what we laid down. Literally a musical postcard from the beach... There were a few surprises included.

Our musical adaptation of an obscure Tennessee William's Tone Poem, The Gold Tooth Blues had been introduced to me by Dakin Williams, Tennessee's older brother and only living family. We met in Memphis at a party given by my parents for a large arts organization on a weekend I happened to be there. Dakin and his manager, Farris Evans and a small entourage were there, and we hit it off. We met up again when we visited New Orleans and later Key West, and as we partied, we became each other's admirers. Thus, the insert on the middle card of the Perdido Beach CD and Dakin's picture with clip comment. David and I went into the session with the poem's words, nothing else. I had read through the tone poem and had ideas for a possible direction I wanted to go in. David was brilliant the way he creatively went with me and drove us in that direction. I think we gave it a life. Dakin told us Tennessee would have been pleased.

"Perdido Beach" sold well and is still available along with my other CDs on Amazon, iTunes, Spotify, and most music sites in downloads. We also professionally filmed a few night's shows. I have the masters and have never even looked at them. Perhaps it is time. We were at our zenith then.

In the mid-2000s, I returned to Memphis to see my mother through some illness. It turned into a two-year stay. David was beginning to branch out with opportunities and offers. He worked with Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones. He was

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sept. 10 or 17 - Virtual Performance
details TBD Online Only - Stay Tuned for
Details

"Shelander" Continued...

touring with a Motown Revue, a revival of the Temptations on an Asian tour, and was to go back out a few days after his untimely death. Locally, he was a mentor for a few chosen protégé who valued him and still are much thankful for the opportunity. Larry and Kathy Beall became close friends to David and had a recorded music jazz party celebrating him at Seville Quarter.

Shelander had written a treatment of his late step-father, William Brinkley's novel "The Last Ship." Brinkley was known for his previous book, "Don't Go Near the Water," which became a feature film. The Last Ship had been accepted by TNT, filmed as a pilot with ten episodes ordered and did appear on TV for several seasons. He had also written music for it and the soundtrack for Treme', filmed in New Orleans, which close friend Tom McDermott also played in. He and Tom spent much time in Brazil, exploring the music and ethnocentric culture that influenced David so much.

After I returned from Memphis, we started gigging again when he was home. He brought me presents, and I finally felt our professional relationship had softened and come almost full-circle.

And then he was gone.

September 3rd, 2013. The Day the Music Died, (from American Pie by Don McLean). Pianist David Shelander suddenly passed away. He was running a day-time car errand with a friend and ran inside to get his wallet, I was told. He had a heart attack and died. Just like that. I was paralyzed. I had said goodnight to him about 12-hours previously. I vaguely recall lying in a crumpled heap on our living room floor, sobbing. Don sat on the couch, shocked and silent, rubbing my back. I could not wrap my head around it. I still have not made peace with it.

I often say that no one goes unscathed. Every artist has/had their demons, including this author. Working that many nights, years, in such a toxic environment had its stresses and emotional tolls. I hope that part wasn't apparent to audiences. I choose to remember the positive times, David, when he was at his best, the wonderful people, faces, and voices, I can still recall. They stay with me and nourish me in inexplicable ways.

I have written this at the request of Jazz Society's (JSOP) Carolyn Tokson. I'd like to thank her for asking and caring to learn more about the brilliant genius, David Shelander. It has given me a chance to look at our past almost as an observer. Knowing many things now, after David's death

previously unknown by me, I have a deeper appreciation with more empathy and feeling about him. There was never a more talented and stronger accompanist/partner than he. He was also working on a Master's degree.

We had a sincere memorial ceremony for David with much help from James Atkins and Gino Rosaria, two of Dave's favorite protégé' and a few special musician friends. It was very well attended. If a bomb had gone off, the musician pool of Pensacola would have been drained.

After his death, I contacted Marcia Kern, the Brazilian vocalist he had recently recorded with. Dave had given me a rough of two-finished songs from Rio, I believe, upon his return. He loved Bossas and flourished in his time with her in Brazil. It was lyrical, real, and wonderful. Contacting her through Facebook, I asked if she wanted to have anything included at the funeral. She replied through an interpreter; "I feel very honored to participate in away from the ceremony, through my words, so that everyone knows how much David captivated us. He was very special. The angels live far away from us, certainly. And of the life you went away. NO!! Life begin in you now."

Peace,
Marcia Kern

Not too long before his untimely passing, for some reason, I asked David how he felt about God. He replied without hesitation..."He's all right with me." That gives me comfort; I miss him every day. He will forever be my "Piano Man." And I will think of him in the songs along the way.

Find the Remembering David Shelander site on FaceBook for more info and pictures. He has a CD with Sid Page, a violinist with Dan Hicks and the Hot Licks. Not sure if it is still available. Our Perdido Beach is on most music sites.

Holly Shelton is a professional singer/cabaret artist. Happily married to Don Snowden, recently retired Department-Head, Pensacola State College, Music and Theatre, Symphony player, and Conductor of the Pensacola Civic Band.

Shelton has appeared locally, nationally, and internationally. Finishing a Master's in Social Work in 2012, Shelton is a practicing psychotherapist, MSW, and until Covid-19 worked in a behavioral hospital in Pensacola. She still sings and hopes to get back to it when the smoke clears, and folks are healthy. 🎷

WHAT ARE YOU LISTENING TO?

With so many of us at home and not able to go out to hear what live jazz is available, we are listening instead to some of our favorite phonograph records, CDs, MP3s and streaming musical events. Send me an email at ctokson@hotmail.com so we have an idea of what are your favorites that help you while away the cares of COVID-19 and the challenges it brings. 🎷