

RAMAR BAKER, RAMAR THE STAR, HAS DIED IN AN AUTOMOBILE ACCIDENT

by James Green



Ramar Baker

Ramar Anton Baker, also known as Ramar the Star, was a rare combination of talent, intelligence, and discipline. Ramar was loyal, honest (sometimes brutally), and had integrity. Ramar was a son, a brother, a musician, an artist, and a friend. Everyone who had the privilege to know Ramar will miss his presence and the peace it brought to their life.

Ramar was tall, strong, and to many a quiet and pensive man. Some considered him a wise and gentle giant. For those lucky enough to be close to Ramar he was also fun loving, funny, and an inspirational leader. Ramar achieved so much in his too short life, and in spite of his abilities and accomplishments, he always remained humble and kept his strong faith.

Ramar was born in Lawrence, Kansas, on January 5, 1986, and graduated from Pine Forest High School. Like so many, Ramar's musical talents were nurtured at church when he was a child. As a young man Ramar met Chris Snowden and Rickey Duffy and they played their first gig together in 2007 at a wedding reception. After that gig Ramar, Chris, and Rickey began playing together all the time and became the "go-to" rhythm section for many different artists. Chris and Ramar became close friends, would cut up all the time, and referred to themselves as two grumpy old men like the Jack Lemon and Walter Matthau movie.

Rickey, Ramar, and Chris played regularly at numerous different church's events around the Pensacola area. They were the rhythm section for numerous artists when they performed in or around Pensacola including smooth jazz saxophonist Antoine Knight, blues man Jamell "Melly Mel" Richardson, and gospel artists such as Pascha Cables and Ernest Pugh. There are too many to list them all. Ramar's musical talent continued to bloom and grow.

Ramar was one of the few people that was capable of

covering Tuesday Night Jazz when Gino Rosaria was not able to make it. Tuesday Night Jazz gigs were the only times I was fortunate enough to play with Ramar. Ramar also played with us some nights when Gino was there—sometimes both playing keys and sometimes one of them playing horn parts on their keyboard. Those nights were some of the most exciting and entertaining Tuesday Jazz gigs ever—we played among other things Stevie Wonder, Earth, Wind, and Fire, and Frankie Beverly and the Maze. We had Micah Roland singing some and Trey Campbell singing others, and it brought the house down. When we played Pensacola Jazzfest and performed Snarky Puppy's Lingus, Ramar was the obvious choice to play Cory Henry's solo at the end while Gino held down the rhythm. It was an inspirational performance we will always remember.

In 2015 Ramar went on tour to France with pastor Solomon Bozeman. Ramar was a natural leader among his band mates on that tour, and his success on the tour inspired him to focus even more on pursuing music as a career. Ramar was later asked to be part of the B.B. King All Star Band where again he was a leader and a standout performer. The B.B. King All Star Band toured on a cruise ship, and Ramar preferred not to be out over the water so he resolved to find a way to continue his music career on land.

Ramar moved to Atlanta recently where there is more opportunity to play with musicians of his caliber. Last year Ramar went on tour with Chandra Currelley where again he was a standout performer and leader among his band mates. Sadly, that would be his last tour because of the pandemic, and his untimely passing.



Self portrait of Ramar Baker.

Ramar was also a very talented visual artist, and any of his social media friends have seen his work. He started with drawing, added color, and eventually started painting. He was constantly expanding his horizons and trying new ways to express himself.

While it may be hard to imagine how Ramar was able
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to accomplish so much with his time, those who knew him well understood. Ramar did not waste time. He did not stay out after gigs, and he did not go out partying. He was focused on things that mattered and it shows in all he was able to achieve.

Ramar truly was a star, and his memory will live on forever with those who were fortunate enough to know him, hear him perform, or see his art.



IRA SULLIVAN, MULTI-INSTRUMENTALIST DIES: PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

by F. Norman Vickers



Ira Sullivan on Sax.

Ira Sullivan died of metastatic pancreatic cancer at home in Miami on September 21. He had performed for a couple of Pensacola JazzFests and had also come to Pensacola to play for my daughter Marie's wedding in 1986, so some recollections will be personal.

First, a bit of background on Ira. He grew up in Chicago in a musical family. He played trumpet, saxophone, and flute. It had been said that he could play any instrument with a mouthpiece. While in Chicago he played with a small group which entertained visiting jazz artists who came through the area. In such a position, for example, he had opportunity to play with the likes of Charlie Parker and Miles Davis.

Ira was a committed Christian who proclaimed his faith but was humble and not overbearing about it. For example, Amazing Grace was always his closing number. Red Rodney traveled with Ira in the 80s and they played a Seville Quarter for a Jazz Society event. Betty and I had opportunity to have dinner with Rodney who told us. "I'm Jewish and Ira has been urging me to join the organization—Jews for Jesus!"

In the 1960s, Ira moved to the Miami area to have a more normal family life. He connected immediately with a local church and the music school at U of Miami.

Ira played a jazzfest for the Jazz Society here in April 1986. Some months later, my daughter Marie announced her plans for her wedding and asked me to choose the musician(s) for the wedding and the reception. "And can we have a saxophonist?" she asked. I contacted Ira and told him that

likely I couldn't pay him what he would make in Miami for a weekend, but that I had some ideas which I hoped would make it worth his time. So, that was set for weekend of August 16, 1986

Ira drove; he always did because as a multi-instrumentalist—trumpet, saxophone and alto flute—his trunk was always full. He played a gig in Tampa on Friday night with Nat Adderley's group. Then after the gig, got in his car and drove eight hours to Pensacola arriving in time to catch a couple of hours' sleep at the (then) Hilton Hotel before going to St. Christopher's Episcopal Church to practice with the church organist.

He played alto flute at the wedding and also wore a choir robe—unusual for him in that his own church is less formal. He said, "I dressed up in my angel suit!" Then at the reception at the Hilton he played with a group which included Ray Parker, piano; Frank Horne, bass; Jimmy Gillis, guitar; and Joe Occhipinti, saxophone. Ira, of course, played trumpet, tenor sax, and alto flute. The in-laws remarked, "Best wedding reception music we ever heard."

The following day, Sunday, I hosted a jazz jam at Apple Annie's in Seville Quarter. The musicians who played the wedding reception performed as many others who sat in. We had an unexpected guest, a trombonist who had just left New Orleans after a long engagement with the Dukes of Dixieland; he sat in for several numbers as well. On Monday night, Ira was performer in Destin at a regular event which included jazz music and dancing. He reported a successful evening by saying, "There were more people there on a Monday night than we usually have in Miami on a Saturday night."

Wonderful memories. Ira performed for Pensacola JazzFest at least one more time and, in addition, came through on the tour, previously mentioned, with fellow-trumpeter Red Rodney.

There are a number of YouTube selections featuring Ira. This includes a two-hour program honoring Ira's 89th birthday. I watched that one live and then phoned Ira later; He doesn't do e-mail. That tribute was organized by the jazz society in Miami, showing the esteem with which Ira was held. And recently, the Miami group put together a large number of performers playing, separately, Amazing Grace, Ira's regular closing theme.

Ira was a special individual who has made positive changes in many, many lives. He will be missed. Recommended listening: many of Ira's YouTube presentations.

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.

JAZZ JAM IS BACK AND GUMBOS ARE IN PLANNING STAGE

by Carolyn Tokson

Jazz Pensacola offered its first Jazz Jam since the COVID 19 lockdown on Wednesday, October 7 from 6:30 to 8:30 PM at the 5 Barrel at 121 S. Palafox. Reviews from attendees and members was very positive and upbeat. John Link, keyboard player and board member said the place was “classy, with a street scene New Orleans vibe. It had cool lighting, really nice duct work, a great bar, interesting fans.” Roger Villines, former president and horn player, said the sound was really “great for horns”. Our president Fred Domulot echoed that the other musicians also liked the sound and space for the band to stretch out for distancing. Reports are that a lot of young people walking down the street dropped in and had very good comments about their first experience with the Jazz Jam and the bar. The spacious room allowed for distancing. Thanks to Treasurer John Eisinger and vice-president Dave Schmidt for working the door, and to Noemi Ruiz for volunteering to assist.

Co-owners Tom Akin and Jason Mosley allowed patrons to bring in food from nearby venues as long as they bought drinks at the 5 Bar. Presently they are working to offer a very simple menu in the near future.

The next Jam is Wednesday, November 4 at the times above. Presently entry is free for the Jam with donations requested. Mark your calendar and look for Jazz Alerts from our office. Note the change of day from Mondays to Wednesdays. Fred is talking to Seville Quarter about the option for a Gumbo in November. Stay tuned. 🎷

AN INVITATION TO JOIN

by Carolyn Tokson

Are you already a member of Jazz Pensacola? If you are, we are very grateful for your continued support. If you are not a member, let's look at some reasons that you might have for joining. One, you may enjoy listening to jazz and look forward to attending different events here in town and in the surrounding areas. Two, you may enjoy the camaraderie of meeting friends at jazz events. The list goes on. You have your reasons.

But wait, you say. Where are those events now? Where is the Jazz Jam or the Gumbo? Valid question. In an effort to be cautious of the health and safety of our members, we, like so many other 501(c)(3) organizations, have had to cancel our planned events during this unusual time. Until recently we have been limited to virtual events such as the live-streaming event featuring the winners of the Student Competition held September 10 at Artel Gallery with no audience except those watching by the Facebook page. Even the competition in March had to be done in a totally innovative manner by use of technology. So yes, you are right. If you join right now, events are constrained by the boundaries of the city and county health recommendations

and the Board of Directors' need for caution. We have just this month had a Jazz Jam and do hope to be presenting more events as time goes on and our event spaces reopen. So it's true, you can't get the discount for events until we are able to meet in person and go back to whatever we thought was “normal”.

Let's look at benefits of joining from another angle. Let's look at the fact that jazz clubs all over the US are closing right now. Let's consider that the largest and most popular music organizations in the world are in the same situation as we find ourselves. Other area jazz societies have had to rein in their plans and cancel events or hold them virtually. They are selling all the stock they have from past festivals to keep afloat. We are not in this by ourselves. Jazz is America's own home grown music. It has been carried world wide by jazz ambassadors from this nation. It is a treasure and we owe it our allegiance and support. Maybe, you would join just to support the preservation and growth of a specific art form which is alive and in a state of flux just as we are. Do it to move jazz down to the younger generation. That's what I'd recommend. Do it for the simple joy of supporting jazz, for giving a relatively small amount of money to be a part of something that is larger than you or I.

Memberships for Jazz Pensacola cost \$40 for a single membership and \$60 for a couple membership. Student memberships are \$5. You may join online at www.jazzpensacola.com or you can send a check to the office at Jazz Pensacola, 3 West Garden St., Suite 418, Pensacola, FL 32502-5633. You may also call our administrator Alice Crann Good at 850-433- 8382 and join with your credit card by phone. All memberships and donations are tax deductible. Do it! Do it for jazz!

WHAT'S JAZZING?

by Carolyn Tokson

Life goes on despite the coronavirus and Hurricane Sally who left far too many souvenirs for the residents of northwest Florida. Thom Botsford has a beautiful cedar leaning at a 45 degree angle in his yard as a result of the strong winds. Fred Domulot had damage at his home also. I lost a section of my front deck and the roof from my back patio. Bassist Doug Chambers had several inches of water in his home. Herman Arrington has been busy trying to cut all the trees that fell in his yard. Shirley Burge who lives in Gulf Breeze had some erosion to her patio which has broken away and is being repaired. She is grateful to have her son there to assist her with repairs and preparation for storms. Downtown and a lot of the low lying areas are still trying to dry out and fight mold. It will be a long time before all the trees are cut up and the debris is off the street and our parks begin to look normal.

Still the music goes on. Jazz Pensacola held its first Jazz Jam since the arrival of COVID-19 at the 5 Barrel on Palafox on Wednesday, October 7. The Vineyard on 12th Avenue has

“Jazzing” Continued...

UPCOMING EVENTS

Nov. 4, 2020

Jazz Jam

The 5 Barrel
121 S. Palafox St.
6:30pm-9:00pm

Nov. 16, 2020

Jazz Gumbo

The Music of Wes Montgomery
played by James Green
Phineas Phogg's
6:30pm-9:00pm

"Jazzing" Continued...

closed and we are trying a new downtown location. Thanks go out to Neomi Ruiz and Dustin Bonifay who volunteered to help our Treasurer John Eisinger with door admissions. We can use new volunteers for that task since most of our faithful former volunteers are older and more at risk for the coronavirus. Contact Robert Windt @ rswindt@aol.com if you wish to volunteer. Hopefully we will soon see the return of regular Jazz Jams and Gumbos. The board of directors is trying to move forward with appropriate caution. Joe Occhipinti is still at Calvert's on Tuesday's with his Jazzabouts and on Sundays from 12-2 PM as well. Al Martin has been at the District where they are offering live music regularly. Northwest Florida Blues Society is back at Seville Quarter doing live events on Monday nights. Al Alverado is at McGuire's Irish Pub on Sundays from 11-2.

Further afield, Larry Fletcher reports that the Gulf Jazz Society in Panama City cancelled their Jazz by the Bay Festival and are having no live events as yet. They are eager to be back at Alice's on Bayview where Alice is herself offering some live music. Steve Gilmore had arranged some really quality events there before the society had to shut down events because of COVID-19. Check out their Facebook page which is well-run by member Harry Fager on a volunteer basis. Harry is himself a saxophonist and guitarist; he and his wife, a vocalist, perform at Alice's from the Great American Songbook. Larry reports that their headliners are already set for next year in anticipation of a better environment.

Matt McCarthy's Jazz Jam at the Funky Blues Shack is where it's happening in Destin. He's there every Monday from 7-10 PM. Rebecca Barry is at The Cigar Bar Thursdays in Daphne, AL. Friday and Saturdays David Jones is at the Tuscan Grill in Gulf Shores, AL. The Guffman Trio with Cynthia Domulot, Fred Latenser, Fred Domulot and Chuck Schwartz is at Emeril's Coastal in Miramar Beach on Sundays from 10:30 to 2:30. Jones and Company are at AJ's in Destin 4-8 PM on Sundays. Check our website www.jazzpensacola.com for a calendar of local and area opportunities for live jazz as well as the latest blogs by Fred Domulot, Roger Villines, or Norman Vickers.

Gino Rosaria's "Night Groove" with Marcus Anderson, "Sunday 3PM" with Elan Trotman, and "Road Trip" featuring Althea Rene are playing on jazz stations world wide, Internet and XM Radio, and are available for download and streaming everywhere. He had shows in Denver, Mobile and West Columbia, S.C. this month. He will be appearing at The People's Room in Mobile on November 13 at 8 PM.

Our members from London, Ontario, Canada, Marty and Nancy Holmes checked in during Hurricane Sally. Their daughter, who has dual citizenship, was visiting from the UK and going through quarantine. The local officer of health has mandated masks in public indoor spaces and the infection rate has remained low. Nancy is still working; housing management is considered an essential service. Marty is still playing golf and will continue to do so until the weather prevents. They have some apprehensions about the return of cold weather and the end of outdoor patio dining. We wish them well in the coming winter months. Normally, they would be here for the better weather and golf, but the virus keeps them away.

Carol Lewallen in Bartlesville, OK, who normally spends most of the winter here, reports that she really misses being in Pensacola. She is challenged by vertigo and allergies now but hopes to be down in January. She particularly misses Curt Bol's band and the Five Sisters and our jazz events. A large crew of us got to know Carol and miss her as well as our other friends and members we do not see often.

Norman Vicker's recent review of Jazz Beat Encore: More Notes on Classic Jazz by Lew Shaw in our September newsletter was reprinted in the Syncopated Times. Kudos to Norman for his work keeping Jazz Pensacola in the national scene.

Elisha Miller, past winner in the Student Competition was graduated from the University of West Florida and has relocated to Washington, DC where she is Program Coordinator of the International School of Music there.

Mark your calendars for the Jazz For Justice event on Saturday evening November 15 in conjunction with WUWF. It will be part virtual, part live and will run on WUWF. More details will be forthcoming next month.

A statue in memory of Pat Jolly Feenker now stands in Unity of Pensacola as a tribute to her shining life. Pat was a great fan and active member of Jazz Pensacola until her last days.

A very happy birthday to Tom Sylte, former board member and long time supporter of Jazz Pensacola. Another birthday shout out to Betty Vickers on her recent birthday. The news that Vivian Lamont has had a third heart attack is unsettling for us all. She is home and resting after a week and a half at West Florida Hospital. If you would like to send her a card and do not have her address, you may email me. She requests our prayers and healing energies; she is weak and cards are better than phone calls now. Sincere condolences to the family and friends of Ramar Baker, beloved jazz musician here in the area. He will certainly be missed. 