



## Jerry E Harris

October 21, 1942 - May 7, 2017

Jerry E. Harris, 74, of Bluffton passed away on Sunday evening, May 7, 2017. Funeral arrangements for Jerry have been entrusted to the care of the Thoma/Rich, Lemler Funeral Home in Bluffton.

IN MEMORIAM:

JERRY EDWARD HARRIS

Last night I lost as fine a friend as I have ever known to the scourge of cancer. He fought it bravely and serenely for over four months. In addition to my loss, the world of jazz has also lost a tremendous artist. I have always said that he is the best jazz vocalist that I have ever heard, live or recorded. No less than the late, great saxophonist, Phil Woods, agreed as well and expressed it with more authority than I can claim:

"Jerry Harris is probably one of the greatest singers I have ever heard and I don't say that lightly. He has that unique kind of quality like Joe Williams, Sarah Vaughn and Ella Fitzgerald. He exhibits a total command of the song with no detriment to the lyric. He always respects the lyric and ...the melody. I really think that he is one of the greatest singers on the planet at this moment and I hope that people will recognize his immense talents. To put it simply, Jerry Harris is one of the finest voices in music today!"

The stellar saxophonist and teacher, Dave Liebman, has said that Jerry "was born to sing [and is] a natural entertainer.

Jerry's ear and intonation control was unsurpassed. His vocal range and flexibility was incredible and his sense of time and rhythm was uncompromising. Jerry's mastery of such a broad range of genres is what set him apart from any other vocalist. His home was straight ahead, swinging jazz but he could caress a beautiful ballad to greater depths of meaning; rock out on a classic rock tune; lay down a solid blues number; deftly handle the pulse and spirit of a Brazilian samba or bossa tune; and deliver on straight up show tunes. I have also heard him sing with heavy metal recordings. His performances of Sam

Cooke's "A Change is Gonna Come" were almost religious experiences.

Jerry was born in Milwaukee as one of nine children of a Baptist minister and his wife. When Jerry was three, the family moved to San Bernadino, California, where he grew up. Of course, his first involvement in music was in the church. He also was influenced by popular music but his deepest interest was jazz. He formed his first band in 1956.

Jerry was a veteran, having served four years in the Air Force, initially in Vietnam but later he was attached to the Strategic Air Command in Nebraska and North Dakota as a missile guidance specialist. Of course, he also sang with the SAC jazz band.

Upon returning to civilian life, Jerry began performing at major domestic and international clubs and hotels and also led several bands, including one performing Motown stylings, in the New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania areas as well as up and down the east coast and in Florida. In 1969 he settled in Delaware Water Gap, Pennsylvania because of its proximity to New York and Philadelphia. Living there, he was friends and performed with jazz luminaries such as Zoot Sims, Al Cohn, and Phil Woods. When one of Jerry's sons expressed an interest in playing drums, Jerry lined up lessons for him with Joe Morello, the great drummer for the Dave Brubeck Quartet. About two weeks ago, Jerry received a beautiful and loving letter of support from his long-time friend, Kim Parker, the immortal Charlie Parker's adopted daughter and step daughter of Phil Woods.

Jerry has performed in music festivals throughout the country and in Europe, Scandinavia, and Africa. A few years ago he was hired to sing at a wedding reception in Milan, Italy.

Jerry was living and performing in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands when I moved there in 1999 and we first met when I had the opportunity to play that year in a jazz benefit that he was directing. Over the years we became more connected and for over 10 years I was privileged to play every Friday night at a regular gig he had at The Tavern on the Waterfront in St. Thomas. He was a wonderful mentor for me and a constant musical inspiration. Furthermore, the best musicians on the island would come by regularly to sit in. It was a wonderful opportunity to learn and absorb other players' styles.

Jerry's birthday and mine were one day apart so, in St. Thomas, we would frequently throw a joint party with live music and, of course, Mary's cooking. Jerry and I also shared a voracious appetite for reading. He read The Nation while I read National Review. We both regularly consumed Discovery magazine, National Geographic, Smithsonian Magazine, and Air and Space.

Mary and I moved back to Indiana in 2014 and Jerry moved to Virginia in late 2015. He was diagnosed with several cancers in late December, 2016. He had some radiation treatment for a number of weeks but decided that he was going to forego extraordinary measures and opted for hospice care. He didn't want to go to a facility so Mary and I offered to care for him here in Bluffton and started hospice services for him from Family Life Services in Berne, the present outgrowth of the hospice agency that Mary organized and directed before we moved to St. Thomas.

The first thing Jerry said when he got here was, "We need to have a party while I can still sing." I had been thinking the same thing. We organized a party and extended invitations to his network of friends as well as our friends and family who had come to know him over the years. The turnout of his friends was astonishing. Guests arrived from New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Florida, and St. Thomas. A professional drummer who had started his musical career with one of Jerry's bands came from London, England to the party. When he arrived, we scrambled to borrow a drum set so that he could play with the band that we had hired from Fort Wayne, all of whom were friends of mine and with whom I have been privileged to play over the years. The band members were: Eric Clancy, Michael Patterson, and Cliff Webb. It was a great event of love and celebration and Jerry enjoyed himself immensely.

Jerry said that he had spent his entire life trying to spread love and happiness and he did not want to spend his final days having people being distraught and sad. You made a great run of it my friend.

I hope to be able to post separately from this post a number of illustrative recordings of Jerry and a video from the party.

Lorren & Mary Caffee

# Comments

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“ Oh, my! I just found out! Jerry was an amazing talent and a great soul! I had the privilege of having him singing with me on my Christmas CD! What a cat! I'm sure he is now enchanting souls at a higher place! Love you, my friend!

**Franco Sattamini** - October 15, 2018 at 06:48 PM

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“ I just found out that my good friend Jerry passed away more than a year ago. I knew Jerry in st Thomas Virgin Islands. I left the island in 2005 and I lost connection with Jerry I tried find a phone number to call him but I was not successful. I even looked on Facebook to see if I can find him. Yesterday, an angel came to me and told me check on google. I saw his picture and this is the result . I'm so sad that I did not get to see him for many years . Jerry was like my own brother. He will be truly missed .  
Saltieh Said

**Saltieh Said** - September 05, 2018 at 08:49 PM

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“ Wow, quite a beautiful tribute to an extraordinary man. I , also just found out about Jerrys passing, and as sad as I am I find myself with a smile thinking of him and his great smile, hugs and laughter. We will miss you Jerry  
Xoxo Michelle Cellura Nose

**Michelle Cellura Nose** - January 10, 2018 at 08:15 AM

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“ I knew Jerry for close to 50 years and just found out he passed on. I am still in shock. We met when I auditioned for him when he was looking for a female vocalist in 1970..we sang together for awhile and had much fun. The rest is history for Jerry and I. Too long and and private to explain....my condolences to his sons...Jeff, Bruce and Shawn. Jerry always talked about going to that place that none of us living have ever seen and was obsessed with going to another planet and space. I hope you got there and found peace for all eternity. Still find it hard to process that you are no longer on this planet....but I believe we will meet again and until then Rest In Peace..as always Pam...

**pam** - January 06, 2018 at 12:57 AM

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“ It has been many many years since I last saw Jerry. It mus have been around 1986. We met in the Poconos in the early 80s and became good friends. Life to us in very different directions nonetheless I will always remember the laughter we shared and how he loved to watch Pee-wee Herman just for the laughs. His laugh was uniquely Jerry's.

I loved his voice. His intonation speaking or singing was mesmerizing and calming. There was a nuance in that voice that was clearly noticeable yet indescribable. Jerry became not only a friend to me put a protector as well and for that I am forever grateful.

Rest in peace old friend. I had hoped to have met up with you again during this life time. Maybe in the next one.

C

**Kaye** - May 24, 2017 at 02:21 AM