

# INTERMISSION

January 2011



www.nojcs.org

## Honorary Edition, January 16, 2011

### IN CELEBRATION OF THE LIFE AND TIMES OF HAROLD KNUTSON

With the passing of our very long standing and most dear friend, Harold Knutson, this special edition of *Intermission* is being published to honor and pay tribute to this dedicated musician by compiling the thoughts, recollections, and memories of a few of his many, many friends in the NOJCSC Jazz music family. — Editor



Harold  
Knutson

1924 - 2011

R.I.P.

#### The Life & Times of Harold Knutson:

My story of Harold starts in 2001 when I happened to be near the Community Center in beautiful downtown San Clemente. The Dixieland Jazz Festival by the Sea was underway and the sounds floated along borne by the spring breeze. My interest in Dixieland or Traditional Jazz as I knew it had started forty years earlier in the UK when I was at University and 'Trad Jazz' was the popular music of the day. I continued playing in local pubs for the next twenty years when in 1981 we as a family moved to California USA. Because of the heavy demands of my professional life and work I stopped playing the trumpet and sold it, so for the next twenty years I did not blow a note. Which brings me back to the Dixieland Jazz Festival in 2001 where I first met Harold. We talked and with his insistence and infectious excitement about the music I agreed that it would be a good idea to start to play again. Harold invited me to the New Orleans Jazz Club monthly meeting and specifically to join him in the 'tailgate room' where he was helping twenty or so hopefuls to play the music. Harold insisted that I had 'lead sheets' to play from even though I didn't read music and he made me focus on playing the right notes and chords. From this small beginning Revelation Classic Jazz Band was formed and soon afterward I was elected President of NOJCSC. Truly, without Harold's inspiration being there every step of the way I would not have bothered to play again. I am equally certain that I am only one of many that he helped and encouraged to realize their musical dreams.

Thank you for rescuing me Harold, you are my inspiration.

John Hockins, President NOJCSC

#### MEMORIAL MASS

There will be a Mass at St. Edwards Catholic Church on Saturday, February 5th, at 11 a.m. The Church is located at 33926 Calle La Primavera, Dana Point, CA 92629. The phone number at the Church is 949 496 1307

#### IN LIEU OF FLOWERS

Peggy Knutson, Harold's wife, has requested 'no flowers'. Donations in his memory may be sent to Harold's two favorite organizations, the New Orleans Jazz Club of Southern California and the Senior Center at San Clemente. (See page 8.)

## Musical Biography of Harold Knutson

*(Note: This article was the result of Jay Rice's personal interview with Peggy and Harold Knutson on August 27, 2008 and serves to roughly document Harold's musical endeavors and accomplishments. - Editor)*

Harold's "day job" was that of an electrical engineer and he applied that profession in Los Angeles and Orange Counties for several major institutions including the Fluor Corporation. He moved to Orange County in 1957 and lived in La Habra. He has been a resident of the San Clemente area since 1976.

Harold was initially introduced to music as a piano student in the first grade and later played clarinet in elementary school. He recalls playing piano as a junior in high school in 1940 and regards himself as being "pretty much self-taught." He has generally "played by ear" and became interested in the sounds which were heard when he played various chords and their progressions. He was not always able to have access to a piano so he acquired a guitar about 1945 and continued to explore the chord combinations and possibilities. He acquired his first banjo about 1957 and tuned it in the same manner as his guitar and continued his self studies.

During the mid-50's he became involved with several musician's who were interested in performing together. One of the musician's was a piano player who had a preference for playing and listening to the "Dixieland" style of music. Harold took an immediate liking to the sound and has been an enthusiast of that music ever since that introduction.

In an effort to gain further access to, and knowledge of, this music, he was referred to the New Orleans Jazz Club (NOJC) which met monthly at the Moose Lodge facility in Santa Ana. During the mid-50's he was an "on & off" member of the club attending whenever he could while working and raising his family.

The club reorganized and became the New Orleans Jazz Club of Southern California (NOJCSC). It relocated to the Elks Club facility in Santa Ana and a "woodshed" room was established to accommodate musicians which were preparing to be featured on stage at the meeting. It gave the musician's in the combo a chance to pick a set of tunes and warm-up prior to performing. The "woodshed room" evolved into what is now known as the "tailgate room" at the present day club. Harold was a regular attendee in the practice room and took every opportunity to play the piano. In those days there was not an abundance of piano players willing to work in the back room and Harold was able to develop his skills at an accelerated rate. He was the "unofficial" "tailgate room" director for about 15 years as there was no single steady official on hand. In 1991, under the auspices of Mr. Bruce Gifford, Harold was appointed as "official" tailgate room director and maintained that post until a year ago. He has served in a position to assist and counsel many novice, or "comeback" players, to the joys of making music. He has been available to explain and demonstrate the techniques necessary to tastefully deliver appealing musical interpretations to the beginning players. Harold estimates that he has been affiliated as a member/visitor at the club for approximately 50 years.

Harold believes that his first public performance took place in the La Habra area in the mid-50's when his group performed gratis for Women's Club's, PTA meetings, Garden Club's, and a Shakey's Pizza Parlor.

After moving to the San Clemente area, Harold played in the Novelty Band and Kitchen Klatter Band. He also played in a duo with a clarinet player at the Leo Fessenden Adult Day Care Center and the San Clemente Senior Center for the incapacitated. It was here that he met Senior Services Director Cathy Lee. He later added additional horns to his group and formed Harold's Tailgate Jazz Band. He continues to play for those shut-in folks recovering from strokes, debilitating injuries, Alzheimer's disease and other infirmities.

Harold has donated his time and talents to a number of worthy causes without compensation, and usually always at his own expense. Among those local causes is the San Clemente Amphitheater Project, the Leo Fessenden Adult Day Care Center, the Villa/Atria Del Obispo retirement facility, South County Senior Centers in San Clemente, Dana Point, and San Juan Capistrano. He has also contributed his time and talents to playing for the homeless at a church in Garden Grove during lunch and he generously gave of his musical time in support of a fund raiser project to save the Fox Theater in Fullerton, CA. He has also given of his time and talents to make numerous birthdays, anniversaries, funerals and political campaigns musically enjoyable,

Harold lists among his musical goals was the desire to become a good enough player to play in a musical

combo without embarrassing himself. He claims to be pleasantly surprised to know that he was able to accomplish this feat. One of his primary objectives was to be able to go out into the public arena and play for other people's listening and dancing enjoyment, especially for those folks who are less mobile.

When asked about some of his musical highlights, Harold mentioned that he was able to play banjo in a band at the jazz club that included Mr. Bob Havens, a famous Lawrence Welk Orchestra trombonist. Mr. Havens picked a tune that was unfamiliar to Harold ("Blue and Broken Hearted") and imparted the necessary chord changes to the band members. The band played the tune through a few times and Harold realized that he had gained the necessary proficiency to perform with a top "pro." Harold also related that he was attending the Sisters Oregon Jazz Festival when a request was made for a banjo player to substitute for an absent player in the Uptown Lowdown Jazz Band. Harold made his presence known and he was hired on the spot by leader Bert Barr to play the set. This further reinforced the high level of advancement and skill that Harold had developed to perform with top level bands.

Harold attributes a number of external influences which impacted his musical progress through the years. Among those most prominent in his mind are the opportunities made available through the jazz club tailgate room for practice and performance with a wide variety of skilled musicians. This became a regular part of his existence and allowed him to develop and hone his skill level. He also acknowledged that benefits derived from attending innumerable jazz festivals and jazz cruises over the years where the highest levels of performance and musicianship can be heard. Harold also gives credit to his attendance at four consecutive sessions of the San Diego Jazz Camp where he received highly focused piano instructions from some of the best performers in the Dixieland music business. He indicated that the joy of performing and hearing the well played music sound that is produced from the interaction with a group of good players is very influential and inspirational as is the feeling that comes with it.

When asked what he would change if he could go back and do it all over again, Harold said that he would strive to acquire the best musical education available to him and would work hard toward developing a good musical technique.

His advice to other musicians is to "follow your dream, work hard to achieve your goal, learn whatever you can learn, and go for it."

The best reward for his musical efforts is to perform for others, especially those that are less fortunate and/or who suffer from impairments or handicaps, and to see them enjoying what you're musically giving to them...to see them sing, dance, clap their hands and smile while the music is being played. To be a witness to such an event is reward enough.

— Jay Rice

**Duane's Dedication:**

Harold's patience and dedication to traditional jazz are reasons that I continue to play trombone today. He lead with kindness, and always thanked me for helping him out with one of his gigs. I will miss him.

— Duane Eber-



**Lois's Dedication:**

Harold was such a sweet guy! We sometimes played piano at the same gig and he was always so generous about sharing time at the piano. I will miss him.

— Lois Brien

## Jay's Tribute:

On Jan 3rd, 2011, the Trad Jazz world lost one of its' grandest proponents with the passing of Harold Knutson. I met Harold in 1997 at the San Diego Jazz Camp, the one which is sponsored by America's Finest City Dixieland Jazz Society. We were both students in the class; Harold on piano and banjo and me on cornet. We were attempting to learn all of the shortcuts to perfecting the Trad jazz craft. We studied under the tutelage of some of the finest performers in the business. Harold was a student for 5 consecutive years at the San Diego Jazz Camps studying with such musicians as Steve Pistorius, Bob Shultz, John Gill, Vince Giordano, Hal Smith, Tom Bartlett, Chris Tyle, John Otto, Alan Adams, Clint Baker, Jim Rothermel, John Goodrich, Katie Cavera and others. He also studied with Richard Cruz and Dave Wright before, and after, his jazz camp experiences. He continued his learning experiences by traveling to San Diego to take part in the Trad Jazz Workshops that were conducted monthly by the AFCDJS at the Musician's Union Hall.

Harold was supported in all of his musical endeavors by his dear wife, Peggy.

Harold formed at least four local bands that I performed with: The High Five Plus Two, The Dixie Dudes, The Tailgaters & The South Coast Dixie Band which is still regularly performing today. He was instrumental in getting musicians together to regularly perform for "shut-ins," convalescent patients, adult day care centers, senior centers, private parties and other local events . Harold was personally responsible for establishing, and maintaining, a "Tailgate Room" for the NOJCSC. I was introduced to the "Tailgate Room" when the club was meeting at the Fullerton Elks Club in 1997.

He kept the "Tailgate Room" active when the club moved around to various venues: Santa Ana, Garden Grove, Anaheim, and Westminster. He was instrumental in getting a book of "lead sheets" together in various pitches for the piano, B flat instruments, E flat instruments and bass clef instruments. The book is still in use today. He collaborated with NOJCSC Member George Sherry to provide these reference materials for members personal use at the club meetings and also to purchase for off-site use. The Tailgate Room afforded and opportunity for all musicians to perform monthly with performers of all levels. It is still used by musicians who want to "warm up" before performing at the jazz club; musicians who don't have any opportunity to interact with other players; new players just learning their craft, and players returning to music after a long musical lay-off. It is a valuable asset to jazz club members and serves as a memorial to Harold's dedication to Trad jazz.

Between the jazz camp and jazz club activities Harold supported, I believe he is directly responsible for motivating, educating, encouraging and supporting upwards of 100 aspiring musicians.

Harold was also an avid supporter of Trad Jazz. His favorite festival bands were Buck Creek and the Grand Dominion Jazz Bands. He and Peggy have traveled the world to be a part of the Trad activities. They participated in several jazz cruises and have driven around the Western half of this continent to take in the various festivals....from Canada to San Diego. To say he was committed and dedicated to the music would be an understatement.

Thanks for the musical hands you have extended to me to the Trad Jazz world my Dear Friend . . . Rest in Peace . . . you've given more than your share. — Jay Rice

## Bill's Tribute:

Harold was an exceptionally gifted musician and a dedicated advocate of traditional Dixieland music. His band brought many hours of pure musical joy to the many fans who were privileged to see, hear and dance to his renditions.

Harold was somewhat of a musical perfectionist. At most of his band practices, invariably he would get in a definite discussion with a band member over the proper musicians interpretation of a musical cord, verse or note. After much discussion, sometimes adamantly expressed, Harold would end the debate with "....after all, this IS Dixieland music" which would mean that interpretation was allowed.

On a personal note (pun intended), I will miss Harold and feel that his contribution has enriched my knowledge and appreciation for "our kind of music".

— Bill Ray, Washboard, Harold's South Coast Dixieland Jazz Band



## San Clemente Honors Musician for Sharing His Craft



Over the past 30 years, if you wanted to hear some old-fashioned Dixieland jazz, you could always turn to Harold Knutson.

The 84-year-old Capistrano Beach resident has been one of South County's prime purveyors of Dixieland jazz, organizing bands to perform at community events and senior centers. He volunteers his services for love of the music.

This month, San Clemente said thanks. Mayor Joe Anderson issued a proclamation saluting Knutson for "sharing his musical gift." Lori Donchak, mayor pro tem, presented the proclamation Friday at the Seaside Senior Center as Knutson, on piano, led a seven-piece band in presenting a free concert.

What is the allure of Dixieland jazz?

"Louis Armstrong said if you don't know, don't mess with it," Knutson said. "The key to creating a magical sound is improvisation," he added.

"When the whole band is playing, they'll be listening to what the guys are doing, and their contribution will be something they perceive is going to fit with that," he said. "When you've got five or six guys doing that, they all have different ideas. If the ideas are good, it reflects in the sound. You know it right away. You can hear it. It's very uplifting. What's taking place is almost instant composing on the part of the guys. What you're doing is on the spot. If it comes out good, it means you did well."

*Note: The foregoing information and photograph were taken from an Orange County Register article written by Fred Swegles and appeared in the September 16, 2008, edition.*

Sometime during the 1950s, Harold and Peggy lived a few blocks away from us in Whittier. Harold and I met at a chess club meeting, an interest we both shared. During this time I had become very interested in hearing the revivalist sounds of jazz and we attended one or more of the Shrine Auditorium events put on by Frank Bull/Gene Norman. I also played some of my new acquired records for him during this time.

Then he moved to the San Clemente area and I moved to Anaheim and then to Ventura. We lost contact until about 1987 when we bumped into one another at the San Diego Thanksgiving weekend festival. By then Harold had not only become a real fan of the music but was teaching himself to play piano and banjo. That inspired me to teach myself to play clarinet. We got together when we could and exchanged information and played our attempts of tunes we liked.

Harold advanced further than I did and became a stalwart at the tailgate segment of the jazz club. I will miss our discussions and times we played together. I'm happy I had something to do with getting him interested in traditional jazz.

— Ken Gates  
Ventura

Harold was a good friend and fellow bandsman. I enjoyed playing drums in Harold's bands whether he played banjo or piano.

For a period of time we rehearsed in Peggy' & Harold's living room. Getting the drum set in there and set up without knocking something down was a challenge.

The one tune I think Harold disliked the most was Chimes Blues. The piano part is meant to imitate the sounds of chimes. We sometimes didn't get it right. I hope you are hearing the chimes now, Harold.

—Dick McArthy



I knew and played Dixieland Jazz with Harold Knutson for about 22 years. I don't recall being introduced, but this meeting started a very long relationship. Early on, I noticed Harold's strong love for Dixieland Jazz, and his attitude to mastery was to play and play and play some more. There were many rehearsals as the Tailgaters jelled into a functioning organization. The Tailgaters turned out to be a respectable Dixieland Jazz Band, and I'm sure Harold was very proud of this accomplishment.

Originally, Harold's instrument was the banjo, but he wanted to become a piano player, and learning to play the piano on your own, is no easy task. But, with Harold's persistence this was achieved and, Oh so slowly, Harold became better at the keyboard. In time, the piano became his principal instrument, and Harold's achievement was constantly demonstrated in his music. So, when you think about Harold, remember his patience and persistence

— Rich Tourné

Harold Knutson was one of the finest gentlemen in the local music business. He loved to play in and lead music groups, especially Dixieland music. He blessed San Clemente and other nearby communities with bands made up of musicians that loved to play - even at practices. He brought out the best in all of us with his easy-going leadership and his commitment to the San Clemente Senior Center to provide joy, listening to and dancing to "swinging" songs that we all loved. Harold was selfless in his love and service to the community. Blessings to all that Love and miss you. Amen

Harold, I am proud to have been your Friend, and look forward to being in your band in Heaven.

— Irish Mike Manion



# NEW ORLEANS JAZZ CLUB OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

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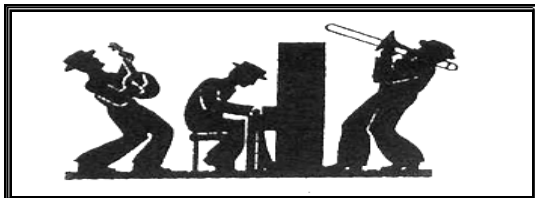
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- F. Sustaining                    \$60 (Plus a Membership A-E)
- G. Patron                    \$100 (Plus a Membership A-E)
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**Total** \_\_\_\_\_

ALL OF THE ABOVE ARE "ONCE ONLY" PAYMENTS FOR THE YEAR AND INCLUDE ENTRANCE TO ALL NORMAL CLUB MEETINGS.

**NON-MEMBERS: \$12 AT THE DOOR FOR EACH CLUB MEETING**

If you are a musician, what instrument(s) do you play? \_\_\_\_\_

Please make your check payable to: **New Orleans Jazz Club of Southern California** and mail together with this completed application form to:

**Stan Verdi**  
**NOJCSC Treasurer**  
**1602 Monterey Road Apt 13-I**  
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**I lieu of flowers the family suggests donations in Harold's memory be sent to:**

**New Orleans Jazz Club of Southern California  
Treasurer  
1602 Monterey Road, Apt. 13-I  
Seal Beach, CA 90740**

**San Clemente Senior Center  
242 Avenida Del Mar,  
San Clemente, CA 92672  
Attention Cathy M Lee**

**Thank you.**