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First CD released at 80

Hoboken octogenarian harmonized on street corners

By: Michael D. Mullins , Reporter staff writer

Musician Tommy Bujacich celebrated his 80th birthday recently by releasing his first-ever CD: "Swingin' into Hoboken."

Bujacich, who has been performing as a vocalist and bass guitar player for 71 years, proves that age is only a number.

On his album, the veteran musician interprets such classics as "Mack the Knife," "Summer Wind," and "On a Clear Day."

From the beer hall to stage

Bujacich, who goes by the stage name of Tommy Beau, was born on March 20, 1926 at 319 Adams St. At the age of 9, Bujacich began playing trumpet with a Hoboken Yugoslavian band at banquets, churches, and beer halls.

In 1944, Bujacich was drafted into the Navy, where he became a bugler.

Bujacich returned to Hoboken in 1946, and at an Italian picnic on Long Island, he was introduced to Rose Segreto. The two were married at St. Ann's Church and have been together ever since.

In 1947, the couple moved into a cold-water flat on 327 Adams St., where Bujacich began working as a machinist, producing perfume containers.

Although money was tight, Bujacich never forgot his love of music. Through the GI Bill, he was able to receive musical instruction at a conservatory on Hudson Boulevard - currently Kennedy Boulevard - where he mastered the bass guitar.

Within months, Bujacich was performing as a soloist at clubs throughout Hudson County.

Lasting impressions

"He was always full of life. He was the guy to be with," recalls Ron Mazurek, a composer, college music teacher and electric keyboardist who performed with Bujacich for 15 years throughout the 1970s and '80s. "He could relate to anyone on any level. He had great charm."

Another friend, 69-year-old Art DeRose, jokes that when Bujacich makes it big, DeRose plans to become Bujacich's limousine driver.

"He's my hero. The guy brings the life of the party with him wherever he goes," said DeRose, who designed the layout and took the pictures for the CD.

Bujacich's older cousin, Frankie Begonia, grew up with Bujacich in Hoboken and remembers when the two would harmonize on street corners together.

"We were self-taught. We wanted to express ourselves, and this is how we did it," said Begonia, who now lives in Florida.

About Bujacich's CD, Begonia added, "That's wonderful. He's been through the ropes and he's done his time. He might not have ever made it big time, but he's touched everyone on every level."

The CD

Bujacich's daughter Joan, who is a singer and plays the piano, decided to create a demo as a surprise for Bujacich's birthday, and as a tribute to him. What began with a few songs soon grew into a full-length album, with Bujacich performing alongside his daughter in a studio, just as they had done years before at clubs throughout New Jersey.

"I wanted something of quality to capture his voice the way it is today and keep it forever," said Joan. She learned to love music through listening to Bujacich, whose own father was an opera singer, practicing when she was growing up.

"I remember when I was a toddler, bands would rehearse at the house and I would be outside listening," she said. "I loved it. Because of it, I knew I wanted to be a musician."

Girls, girls, girls

Bujacich has no plans of bowing out now.

"I want to work, but there's nobody around," said Bujacich.

He said the proliferation of DJs and the declining amount of restaurants with live music is problematic. "It used to be you could walk down the block and into a club and get a gig, but that's not the case anymore," he said.

Bujacich, who owned one of the first electrical bass guitars in 1958, claims to have started karaoke 50 years ago.

"We used to invite girls to come up on the stage and sing with us. We'd have 20 to 30 girls up there at one time. With every 20 girls up on the stage singing, you'd have a hundred guys trying to get in the place to meet them," he said.

Bujacich's CD can be heard and purchased at www.cdbaby.com.

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