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Volume 13 – Edition 6

HIGHER GROUND NEWSLETTER – August 2016

Welcome

Welcome to our August newsletter. Once again, I am amazed at the number of articles and items of interest that appear on an almost daily basis about John Denver. I hope that you enjoy reading through some of the information that I have collected recently for this newsletter. As Aspen in October, the HGA tribute in Phillip Island, and the Monterey Tribute events are coming up soon, we hope that many of you will join like-minded people to celebrate the music and life of John Denver.

HGA John Denver Tribute Weekend

Our tribute weekend will be held on the 14-16th October at CYC The Island in Cowes (Phillip Island). The address is 41-53 Church St Cowes 3922. It is approximately 2 hours drive from Melbourne airport. <http://theisland.cyc.org.au/> Cost is \$87.00 per person for the weekend. We have three sleeping cabins, a kitchen/activities room, BBQ, and they will also provide a fire pit for our 'campfire'.

Food Kitty is \$40.00 per person for all meals. The Victorian people will provide the casseroles for the Friday night's meal.

To secure your place, we will require a \$40 deposit (food kitty). The deposit can be paid directly into my account;

BSB: 733-039

ACC: 542649

Name: Mrs Janette Frawley

Please enter JD + your name in the description so I know who has paid, and follow it up with an email to jefrawley@bigpond.com.

Fundraiser for ARCC

Our fundraiser this year will benefit Peggy McDonald's *Higher Ground Australian Raptor Care, Release and Learning Facility*.

The raffle tickets will be in the post to those who have been nominated to see tickets soon. I am now in the process of finishing the quilt. If you have anything that you would like to donate to our mystery-box prize, please let me know. Also, if you would like to give a cash donation to us, which will be pooled with our donation to *Australian Raptor Care, Release and Learning* please let me know. 100% of all donations will be passed on to Peggy for her raptor care. If you give a cash donation, you will be acknowledged in the newsletter.

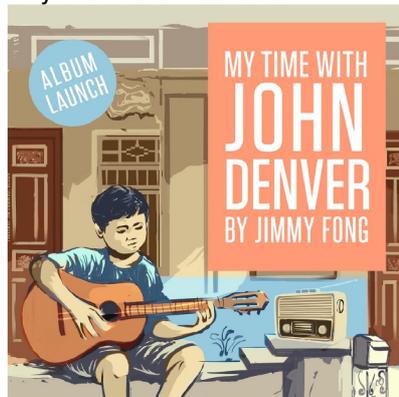
On the Road Quilt (Raffle – 2016)

The quilt is almost completed and it will be the first prize in our annual raffle.

HGA Website/MTWJD CDs available for sale

<http://hgavic.wix.com/hgavic>

In collaboration with Jimmy Fong, we are now able to sell his CDs through the HGA website. Please check out Jimmy's story and photos, including his personal photos of the time he met and performed with John Denver in Malaysia in 1994. We have included some sample tracks for you to listen to. CDs are AUD\$25.00 each, including postage and handling. The CDs are also available to US purchasers. For our Canadian, British, and European customers, please email me on hga.vic@gmail.com for details. Transactions are securely handled by PayPal.



Jimmy will donate a portion of all CD sales made through the HGA website.

Please make your Christmas list and start ordering.

Check out these videos of Jimmy's performances;
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/194804173882789/>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=LPw6YRCMBXE

Mark Cormican –

RMFPA

Willie Hoeffers has advised that the 'We Are One' event for Aspen in October has been cancelled. Please keep watching out on Facebook and through the website for announcements for forthcoming events, particularly those organised for 2017. <http://rockymountainfpa.org/home>

Aspen in October 2017

2017 will be the twentieth anniversary and I am sure there will be many events and performances to celebrate the music of John Denver. A few Aussies will make their way to Aspen for the AIO week, and preparations start to take shape over the next few months. We are really looking forward to meeting up with as many friends as possible during our time in Aspen. Some of us will be taking a (long) road trip from California for the two weeks preceding Aspen. We are looking forward to visiting many places as we make our way up to the Rocky Mountains.

Songs and Stories of John Denver

Renee Armand and Paul Aleman will be appearing together on Thursday 25th August at APCAL (Appellation California) 32749 Ave 7, Madera, CA 93637. Tickets are \$10 at the venue. Gates open at 6pm and the concert starts at 7pm.



John Denver weekend to inspire, entertain

July 26 2016 aholbrook@capitalnewspapers.com

WAUPUN—The music of John Denver is like an old friend, outlasting trends and standing the test of time. Hearing the first few notes of “Rocky Mountain High,” or singing along to “Take Me Home, Country Roads,” can carry a listener back to a time when life was simple and memories were cherished.

Marsh Haven Nature Center is paying tribute to those good times during the John Denver Celebration Weekend Sept. 30 through Oct. 2 in and around the Waupun area.

Now in its third year, this event will bring musician Jim Curry and his band from California to Wisconsin as the featured performer, along with the musical talents of local Gary Cross, and Illinois-based Will Kruger.

Curry, whose voice was heard in the CBS-TV movie “Take Me Home: The John Denver Story,” has performed Denver’s music in sold out shows throughout the country and has emerged as

today’s top performer of Denver’s vast legacy of multi-platinum hits.

Marsh Haven Nature Center is a non-profit, volunteer-supported nature center on the north end of the Horicon Marsh. Nature center director Renee Wahlen said a John Denver event was a perfect match for the mission of Marsh Haven.

“Our mission is to appreciate, conserve, and celebrate nature,” she said. “Not only does John Denver’s music reflect the appreciation and celebration of nature, but John Denver was a big supporter of environmental topics and conservation.”

While Denver is most known for his success as a singer and songwriter, he was also responsible for co-founding the Windstar Foundation based in Old Snowmass, Colorado. This organization, founded in 1976, had a mission to inspire individuals to make responsible choices and to take direct personal actions to achieve a peaceful and environmentally sustainable future.

Wahlen credits the Windstar Foundation for her current role at Marsh Haven Nature Center.

“Years ago, I had travelled out to Colorado to participate in the EARTHcamp Leaders Workshop on the Windstar land. Upon my return, I was looking for locations to hold an EARTHcamp, which are environmental-focused daycamp programs for youth. I came out to Marsh Haven and talked with founder and then-director, Lawrence Vine. He opened the center for me to hold our camps, and we are now in our ninth year of EARTHcamps at Marsh Haven.”

Through that introduction, Wahlen came on board as the nature center director in 2011. She also completed a s programs, which stemmed from John Denver’s own Windstar Foundation.

Marsh Haven Nature Center, W10145 Highway 49, offers hiking trails on 46-acres, an observation tower, indoor museum displays, art gallery, Nature Nook area and wolf den for young visitors, and the Critter Corner. The John Denver Celebration event offers additional activities throughout the weekend including guided nature hikes, visits to the Peace Pole, an outdoor Cowboy Campfire Concert, screening of John Denver related films and documentaries, and educational programs.

A full schedule of events can be found at www.marshhaven.com. For more information contact Wahlen at 920-318-9518 or director@marshhaven.com

Sept. 30 - John Denver Tribute Concert featuring Jim Curry- 7 p.m., Waupun's Historic City Hall Auditorium, 201 E. Main St.

Oct. 1 – Cowboy Campfire Concert -Noon, John Denver Memories Concert featuring Gary Cross – 7 p.m., Marsh Haven Nature Center – Respect Our Earth Theater



Oct. 2 – John Denver Music Matinee featuring Will Kruger – 1 p.m., Marsh Haven Nature Center – Respect Our Earth Theater
Tickets available through Eventbrite.com, by phone at (920) 318-9518 or at Marsh Haven Nature Center, W10145 State Road 49, Waupun http://www.wiscnews.com/article_85c1d171-28e8-5244-af86-ddf32809f58f.html

Jim Curry's Newsletter/Concerts

Jim Curry's newsletter has been posted (click link below) Jim and Anne put together an excellent newsletter regularly. It also includes a link to Anne's blog, which is always fun to read, plus a full listing of where they are appearing in concert. Great news again – Jim and Anne will be travelling on a couple of Holland America ships during April.

Check out Jim and Anne's website at <http://www.jimcurrymusic.com/> for details of their upcoming concerts.

Chris Westfall – Summer performances

Check out Chris Westfall's website for his concert list.

http://www.chriswestfall.com/in_concert.html

Chris Bannister

Chris Bannister has a full listing of his forthcoming John Denver tribute concerts on his website; <http://www.chrisbannistermusic.com/events/>

Ted Vigil

Ted will be performing the following concerts. Check his website for more information.

www.tedvigil.com

Rocky Mountain High Concert

John Denver: A Rocky Mountain High Concert with the Colorado Symphony - September 10 at Boettcher Hall in Denver

We're excited to announce John Denver: A Rocky Mountain High Concert with the Colorado Symphony, featuring audio and video performances by John Denver backed by members of his former band, with the Colorado Symphony. Saturday, September 10 2016 7.30 at Boettcher Concert Hall.

Tickets available through Colorado Symphony Subscription through July 31. Single tickets on sale August 1, 10 am.

Andres Lopera, conductor

Musical legend John Denver is honored in a special concert celebration with your Colorado Symphony this fall. See and hear two-time Grammy Award-winning singer/songwriter and Poet Laureate of Colorado John Denver on video performing in a concert spectacular featuring archival video footage of Denver performing classic songs backed by live performances from former members of his band with full symphony orchestra. This concert is an innovative musical treat and unforgettable tribute. Hear John Denver's voice, see vintage John Denver video

performances, hear stories of John Denver told by old friends. The Concert will include hit songs spanning his career and honor Denver's memory and music.

American Veterans Radio

TUNE IN: www.avradio.org

iPhone - <http://apple.co/1bxUvTh>

Google Play - <http://bit.ly/1E5iUvz>

TuneIn Radio - bit.ly/1EhuOqo

American Veterans Radio is honored to feature the wonderful music of John Denver. Please join Willie From Dillon 4:00 pm ET. The next show will be on Saturday, 3rd September (Mountain time)

Time Zone Chart:

4 - 6pm Eastern time

3 - 5pm Central time

2 - 4pm Mountain time

1 - 3pm Pacific time

12noon - 2pm Alaskan time

5 - 7pm Chilean time

9 - 11pm UK time

10 - 12Mid European time

Next Morning

5 - 7am Japan time

6 - 8am Melbourne, Sydney, Australia time

8 - 10am New Zealand time

If you need to convert any other time click this link:

<http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/converter.html>

Here is the link to the radio player:

http://apps.streamlicensing.com/player-popup.php?sid=160&stream_id=4961

Here is the link to the tunein player:

<http://tunein.com/radio/American-Veterans-Radio-s215261/>

Here is the link to the chat picture:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10209479768371794&set=qm.270061436669054&type=3>

If you can make it to the chat that is wonderful. If you only have time to listen in that is very good too. The beauty of being an ONLINE concert, is that people can listen in from anywhere, enjoying the music of John Denver.

Aspen in October

Keep checking for the events planned for Aspen in October this year. The events thus far can be found at;

<http://www.johndenvercelebration.com/events>



Renee Armand and Paul Aleman: A Life with John Denver

Renee Armand and Paul Aleman bring the genius and joy of John Denver to the Franklin Theater by sharing real and vibrant stories of life on the road with John and his wonderful, unforgettable music Saturday 15th October, 2016 Franklin Theater, Franklin TN. At 7:30pm Tickets from \$25

<http://secure.franklintheatre.com/websales/pages/info.aspx?evtinfo=107199~cfe40b7d-1c56-4c4b-b937-600bdd7c5904&>



35th Annual John Denver Weekend (Germany)

October 21-October 23. Please click the link for details on how to register for this annual event.

jd-weekend@johndenverclub.de

Young John Denver Oral History Project

Carl Franzen

Hooked up with Jim Connor in Far Out, Alabama for my Young John Denver Oral History project. What a lovely day.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1454679788168133/permalink/1566170723685705/>

Pop Impresario Yu Was Inspired By John Denver

By Lin Ching-wen, FCJ Staff Writer Taiwan Today

Six years ago, Yu Kuang went to see a John Denver concert in Dallas, Tex., and it gave him a rocky mountain high about Taiwan that changed his life. He heard Denver tell an audience of 40,000 fans that he was inspired to write "Shanghai Breeze" after touring mainland China. In a fit of parochial fervor, if not patriotic pique, Yu decided that if that's the kind of inspiration songwriters were after, entertainers like Denver should be invited to come to Taiwan so they could come up with possible hits like "Walking in the Taipei Streets," or "One Night in Taipei."

Yu reasoned that since music was such a positive force, if he got into the business of promoting concerts in the Republic of China on Taiwan, he also would be promoting his country. "People all over the world then would know there is a Taiwan, and that in Taiwan there is a Taipei," he said.

Besides, he said, exposure to such foreign entertainment would broaden the horizons of Taiwan teenagers, as touring artists had influenced youngsters in Japan. The rest, as they say, is history.

Yu is now the most successful promoter of pop concerts in Taiwan. Since 1983, he has brought such top chart artists as Tina Turner, Air Supply, the Miami Sound Machine, Berlin, Toto, Patty Page, Rick Springfield, Andy Gibb, Lobo, the Paul Maria Orchestra, Rita Coolidge, Paul Young, Richard Clideman, Irene Cara, and Daryl Hall & John Oates to Taiwan.

Nothing like "Walking in the Taipei Streets" has come out of it, yet.

But his efforts in bridging the cultural gap in introducing Western artists to Taiwan and the Chinese on Taiwan to pop Western music through his radio program won him a ROC Golden Bell Award--the counterpart of the U.S. Emmy. It was the first such prize ever given in Taiwan to a promoter of Western pop music on Chinese radio.

"For years, there was no promotion of such Western entertainment in the ROC due to our government's conservative attitude towards opening up Taiwan's door for other cultures," he said. He, himself, has been "turned on" to Western pop music since his school days. As an aspiring young promoter, he introduced Chinese singers, combos and small bands that performed Western pop and country-western music to Taiwan clubs that catered to American GIs stationed on the island. He remembered Chinese entertainers struggling through such GI requests as "Honky-Tonk Woman," and "Stand By Me."

When the GIs left, many of the Chinese artists later turned to the Mandarin pop music market as performers, music producers, and songwriters. Yu said they adopt the same methodologies used by Western musicians and apply them to Chinese music. Consequently, there is no "pure" Chinese pop music in Taiwan today, he said.

"Those who pay close attention will notice that there was no heavy metal or new music (on the Taiwan pop scene)," Yu said. "What I introduced were mostly 'easy listening' music, and no 'weird' groups or songs." Things have become easier for Yu in the past two years, since the government adopted a more open policy toward foreign cultural imports. He first brought Air Supply to Taiwan in 1983, the first time Taiwan fans of such pop stars were able to come face-to-face with their foreign idols. Last September, he brought them back again. The difference in Chinese and Western pop fans is that "our audience don't really care what Western singers are singing, if the tempo is good, the rhythm pleasant and the melody musical. Expatriates in Taiwan are tuned on more to the lyrics, and the music itself," he said. Yu joked that if a Western artist or group he is promoting stirs up a lot of excitements among disc jockeys on the English-language International Community Radio Taipei (ICRT), it won't be very successful among Chinese fans. But if he finds that Chinese audiences react favorably to a Western group he presents on Chinese radio or



television, he knows he can have a hit by bringing them to Taiwan for a live concert.

Presenting such concerts is not all that easy for Yu in Taiwan. First of all, there are too few venues available. He said he had a lot of successful concerts in the huge, indoor China Sports and Cultural Center bowl, until he was shut out of the arena.

Now he is forced to book his shows outdoors where the unpredictable, sub-tropical, island weather can play havoc with his best laid plans. Tina Turner, for instance, was forced to cover up her glamorous legs and dazzling costume with rain gear when a cold, typhoon-like storm swept the outdoor stadium in which she was appearing earlier this year in Taipei.

Secondly, formalities are a big headache. Yu said there is so much red-tape in bringing a foreign artist into Taiwan that he usually has only seven or eight days left for promotion and ticket sales before the shows go on.

Yu said he is caught on the horns of another frustrating dilemma because of the high cost of bringing in the big names that will guarantee sellouts and a profit for all the time and expense. Last year, Quincy Jones tried to help him get Michael Jackson, a sure-fire super show, but the cost was prohibitive. Yu said he always feels there is a noose around his neck, but that he loves the business too much to give it up. He likes the fact that the agents and managers of the artists trust him to do the best for them and take a chance when there is even a possibility of breaking even on the appearances.

"When they contact me, I can say no today, and I can say no tomorrow, but I can't always say no if I want to stay in the business," he said.

And it's not only his interest in the artists and the music and the glamour of show business that keeps him going: "There's also my reputation, and a commitment to the audiences—a responsibility to bring them the best artists I can. I'm not able to stop, even if I want to." And, in the back of Yu's mind is his original thought that someday one of the artists he brings to Taiwan will walk down the streets of Taipei, bask in the bright lights of the cosmopolitan, turned-on metropolis, and start humming the first bars of an upbeat love song destined to make the pop charts around the world. "One Night In Taipei" hasn't got words or a tune, yet, but the very idea of such a song turning on the world to Taiwan turns Yu on.

<http://taiwantoday.tw/fp.asp?xItem=5114&CtNode=103>

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Tucson Time Capsule: John Denver's day as royalty

Photo By Linda Seeger/ Arizona Daily Star 1992 Feb 11, 2007



John Denver: An environmental legacy remembered

Aspen Times October 7, 2011 Hilary Stunda

ASPEN - Back when the Hyman Avenue Mall was dirt and the check-in gate at the Aspen airport looked more like a casting call for one of Bob Rafelson's movies, Aspen was rife with dreamers, renegades, drop-outs, PhD taxi drivers, artists and vision seekers. They came for the love of the landscape, if not freedom from corporate America, and they spoke of change and environment and how to improve the world.

John Denver and his two buddies, Tom Crum and Bruce Gordon, were three such kindred spirits. Denver was singing at the Leather Jug in Snowmass when Crum pulled into town, having left behind the "security" of being a systems analyst in Denver. He was heading to Jackson, Wyo. They met one evening in a funky A-frame house across the street from the Weinerstube restaurant, where Denver was in the back of room, guitar in hand. Another guy was there, a pilot by the name of Bruce Gordon, and by the end of the night, they were outside laughing, trying to "stuff" Gordon's dog into his back pack for his motorcycle ride home.

Crum never made it to Jackson. "He was like a brother," said Crum of the friendship that spanned nearly three decades before Denver's death on Oct. 12, 1997, when the experimental plane he was flying crashed into Monterey Bay. What began with Denver learning Transcendental Meditation from Crum later turned into years of touring.

"It was the first time that any entertainer of his caliber was in front of such crowds," recalled Crum. "Madison Square Garden. Two shows a night. 40,000 people. John would be on a revolving stage that wasn't very high. People could get at him at all angles. He said, I need somebody to keep my head together and take care of all the security."

Denver was persistent: "Just give me three weeks," he said. "It's not a lifetime."



Three weeks turned into six years.

By the mid-1970s, Denver became the biggest-selling singer in the world. In 1973 he sold more than a million copies of the single, "I'd Rather be a Cowboy."

"It wasn't just, let's be rock stars. It was more like let's take care of ourselves," said Crum. "John wanted to make a difference; to be a compassionate human being. And he was incredibly generous. He had an amazing creative spirit. Boundless energy. He really wanted the world to work," he said.

Late-night sessions about the state of the world, the Arctic refuge, global hunger, AIDS, poverty, anti-weapons; space, ocean conservation. "We talked about how the world needs a place that can be a demonstration center and an education center; a place where people could come and dialogue. John always wanted deep thinkers to come together and talk about major issues," said Crum.

Serendipity favors the dreamer. The Snowmass Monastery was in financial hard times and there was a piece of land for sale - 1,000 acres.

"We walked the land. It was magical. From an aerial view, it was shaped like a whale," recalled Crum. "There was this immediate identification because of John's relationship with Jacques Cousteau. That was the catalytic moment for him."

It was 1976. The Windstar Foundation was born, giving co-founders Denver and Crum the ideal venue to attract the world's most fascinating and powerful people to promote sustainable living and discuss ways to help solve the world's problems. Ecological-design researchers such as Buckminster Fuller and Amory Lovins, the Cousteaus, and Ted Turner. For many years, seminars were held. Lives changed. Buckminster Fuller once said, "Find what it is that is needed and wanted and go do it."

Denver took heed.

"He was extremely brave and courageous," said Crum. "He would be at a hearing in Washington D.C. over something like the Alaska oil spill and he might not have all the facts. Even though he might not be the person to best articulate his position, he would stand up and speak from the heart."

Not only was Denver committed to preserving the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, he was committed to world hunger, helping found the World Hunger Project in 1977. Other focuses included the AIDS crisis in Africa, homelessness, the Chernobyl disaster. He was steeped in environmental conservation projects with the Cousteaus, space exploration. Denver was the first person to introduce the idea of sending a citizen up in space. In 1986, he passed NASA's taxing physical exam and was in line to be the first citizen on the

space shuttle until President Reagan decided to send a teacher instead.

After the Challenger disaster with teacher Christa McAuliffe aboard, John dedicated his song "Flying for Me" to all astronauts.

His passion and commitment took him all over the world, to Africa, Russia; China. "He was ahead of the curve," said Crum. "John really was an environmentalist before there was a word for that," said Ron Deutschendorf, Denver's brother. "John loved being able to associate with people who could make a difference," said Crum. "He was never as happy as when he was onto a project when significant numbers could be influenced in a powerful way. That's where he had a lot of juice. That magic continued through the '80s but everything has its run. The spin-off effects are still there."

But being human, cast into the role of a megastar with 14 gold albums (eight platinum), being "famous" wasn't easy.

"Being a celebrity you get caught up in that lifestyle," Crum said. "John was an artist with great highs and great lows. He'd go through those lows. It's also where he got motivated to write music. It's interesting that sometimes artists get caught in that conscious pattern of thinking they need the low in order to get creative again. That's different. John lived an amazing life and died doing what he wanted to do."

John Denver learned to fly from his father, who was the consummate pilot, an Air Force lieutenant colonel, and who set three speed records flying a B-58.

"Flying brought us together, we shared a love for it," said Bruce Gordon, who founded Aspen's EcoFlight, an organization that has been flying to protect America's public lands for more than 25 years. He has logged more than 2,500 miles flying in more than 10 countries around the world, while offering clients a bird's-eye view of the state of the planet.

"John learned how to fly small planes, then experimental planes; aerobatic planes. He was talented with everything. He was an excellent stick," Gordon said. "John and I did an aerial educational tour of the forests of the Pacific Northwest; Vancouver Island where enormous clear-cutting was going on," said Gordon. "We did it in his Learjet. We put the flaps down and flew very slowly with some notable dignitaries, which enlightened everyone to how rampant the clear-cutting was. The aerial perspective puts it all together. It lets the land speak for itself. That's what got John so motivated to help out."

The plane Denver flew on this last flight was an experimental plane.

"He had just gotten the plane a day or two before," said Gordon. "He should have filled the tanks at the start because he didn't know the plane well enough," he said.



Fourteen years after his tragic death, his friends can only muse.

"He was a major voice for the environment," said Gordon. "Right now Congress is in the process of dismantling laws that we've had since the '90s that are a network for clean health, clean air and clean water. We need a voice like John's because there's nobody carrying that banner right now."

"You don't have to be all that special to do something very special," said Crum. You just have to find something you love and live a life that shows it. "John found music. He turned it into a vehicle to make a huge difference."

Crum and Gordon still live in Aspen. Crum is an author and teacher, traveling the country teaching his Aikido principles for conflict resolution, managerial development, and sports performance. Gordon just returned from his annual "Flight Across America" program, where he took students on an aerial tour over national parks in Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona and Utah to learn about the environmental pressures being imposed upon them, such as the air-quality degradation caused by the adjacent San Juan and Four Corners coal-fired power plants - two of the most polluting coal power plants in the country - and natural gas drilling of the San Juan Basin. Gordon and Crum have their memories. Each laughs when recalling Denver's childlike, boundless enthusiasm for life.

Years ago, Gordon was invited on a trip with the band in Puerto Vallarta. They were having dinner at a restaurant perched on a cliff.

"We're having a couple of beers and the next thing you know, John appears in his bathing suit, gets up to the edge. The whole band freaks out and he lays out a perfect swan dive. Nobody even knew he could do that," he smiles. "That was cool."

<http://www.aspentimes.com/article/20111009/ASPENWEEKLY/111009860>

John Denver ... Thank God he was a Country Boy

By Ron Onesti Special to dailyherald.com 31/10/2014

Just past the 17th anniversary of the fateful plane crash that took the life of John Denver, the American folk-pop icon was immortalized Hollywood-style with a star on the town's Walk of Fame.

It happened Oct. 24 with an unveiling attended by his children, Jesse Belle Denver and Zak Deutschendorf (Henry John Deutschendorf was John Denver's real name). In honor of this well-deserved recognition, we at The Arcada Theatre hosted a special tribute concert performed by Jim Curry.

Curry has emulated the John Denver experience, not only by just naturally looking like Denver but also by using his own voice, which sounds

incredibly similar to that of the famed superstar, gone too soon.

Song after song, it was a "close your eyes and John Denver was there" experience. Curry, who is truly "The real deal," voiced Denver's songs in the CBS made-for-TV movie "Take Me Home: The John Denver Story."

Curry's show at The Arcada was far from a Las Vegas-style impersonator act; it was a true John Denver experience, as though we were being serenaded by a fireplace in a Colorado ski resort cabin with snow-capped mountains and American Bald Eagles flying overhead. The evening was a fabulous John Denver jukebox filled with body-swaying emotion and sing-a-long memories.

To add to the legitimacy and to the musical quality of the presentation, two former members of John Denver's band were part of the show: guitarist/songwriter John Sommers and world-class drummer/percussionist Richie "Gajate" Garcia.

Sommers not only played guitar and sang backup vocals for Denver, but he also penned one of Denver's biggest hits, "Thank God I'm A Country Boy." In actuality, he only wrote a handful of songs, but continued on as one of the most sought-after musicians in the biz. It is an interesting story of how his 15 minutes of songwriting fame (15 minutes that continues on today) came to be.

"I just got out of the Navy and was about to interview with TWA," Sommers said. "But I wanted to take a little break before I did so I went to Aspen (Colorado) for a while."

That "short vacation" turned into a love affair with the Rocky Mountains -- one that would change his life forever. He began doing local folk music gigs, performing with a Navy buddy and another old friend. The trio called themselves "Liberty," and they became local favorites. One night, after playing a song Sommers wrote called "A River Of Love" (the group's only original composition), local celebrity and up-and-coming performer John Denver approached the band and asked if he could record the song. Sommers was ecstatic. Within a few short months, Sommers' song made it onto Denver's seventh album, Farewell Andromeda -- the same album with the song "Zachary and Jennifer" about Denver's two children.

Soon after, Sommers was inspired to write "Thank God I'm A Country Boy." He patiently waited as it was two albums later before it was released as a single. The patience paid off. It shot up not only the country music charts, but the pop charts, as well. Denver was now a bona fide superstar and Sommers, a hit songwriter.

Garcia also took the stage last week with the Jim Curry Band. Talk about the real deal. This guy not only toured with Denver, but he also traveled with Diana Ross, Phil Collins and a host of other



superstars. He is, by the way, the regular drummer for Frankie Valli on tour. Garcia's memories of John Denver center primarily on what a down-to-earth person he was. "We would be recording for hours, but when it was all over, John always had a restaurant booked for us and we hung out, jammed, and told stories for hours," Garcia said. "He loved the 'toys' of percussion. From congas to the maracas, he had as much with them as I did."

I have been as much of a fan of John Denver as the next guy. But as I was watching the show, I thought to myself just how many times I was driving along with the windows down and the radio on, singing "Rocky Mountain High," "Sunshine On My Shoulders," "Annie's Song," "Take Me Home, Country Roads," "Sweet Surrender" and, of course, "Thank God I'm a Country Boy." It's gotta be thousands of times, a testimonial to how much his music has innocently touched our lives.

John Denver is a treasured piece of Americana, as much as baseball and apple pie. He was the essence of folk music as it originated. Of course there is Elvis, Sinatra and Michael, but in my book, this "Country Boy" is right up there among the music legends.

• Ron Onesti is president and CEO of The Onesti Entertainment Corp. and The Historic Arcada Theatre in St. Charles. Celebrity questions and comments? Email ron@oshows.com.

<http://www.dailyherald.com/article/20141031/insights/141039978/>

The Only Way Down from a John Denver High is on Skis

March 20, 1978 People Magazine

John Denver could have thrown down his ski poles and cried. A Rocky Mountain low had blanketed Aspen airport with ominous clouds and snow, threatening to deprive his Celebrity Pro-Am Ski Classic of schussing stars. But at the last moment sunshine appeared on John's shoulder, leaving Aspen up to its boot-tops in would-be Killys. Among those who came to challenge the slopes: mucho macho Clint Eastwood, comic Steve Martin, Today's Tom Brokaw, Mario Thomas and her salt-and-pepper swain, Phil Donahue, Smothers brother Dick, game-show omnipresence Carol Wayne—and jocks Bruce Jenner, Bert Jones and Lynn Swann.

Why had the larklike Denver turned promoter? "I've had a deep love affair with skiing for many years," he confessed. "I want to take this event and do with it what Bing Crosby and Bob Hope have done for golf." The result was half ski, half soiree: Days were reserved for racing, while the après-ski menu boasted everything from disco to bananas flambé.

There were some historic moments. Wholesome Bruce Jenner was caught surreptitiously guzzling beer and insisting that it contained Wheaties. Denver Bronco quarterback Craig Morton, hors de ski with minor injuries, was pulled from the lineup for the best-looking substitute of his unusual career—Denver's petite wife, Annie. Just to prove it wasn't all fun and games, though, Denver streaked to victory in the pro-am team event with Swann, the Pittsburgh Steelers' nimble receiver, and ski pros Tyler Palmer and Ken Corrock. The next day Denver, the terror of the slopes, soundly thrashed four one-on-one challengers before losing to football's Ed Podolak. Friends hinted that John dragged his skis deliberately—ever the considerate host—but his only response was to flash a White Christmas grin. Then he treated the guests to a sumptuous feed at the Red Onion before packing his bags for Canada's Bugaboo Mountains. The best après-ski, he seemed to say, is more skiing

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Rhymes & Reasons

(John Denver)

So you speak to me of sadness and the coming of the winter,
The fear that is within you now that seems to never end,
And the dreams that have escaped you and the hope that you've forgotten,
And you tell me that you need me now and you want to be my friend,
And you wonder where we're going, where's the rhyme and where's the reason?
And it's you cannot accept: it is here we must begin to seek the wisdom of the children
And the graceful way of flowers in the wind.

For the children and the flowers are my sisters and my brothers,
Their laughter and their loveliness would clear a cloudy day.
Like the music of the mountains and the colors of the rainbow,
They're a promise of the future and a blessing for today.

Though the cities start to crumble and the towers fall around us,
The sun is slowly fading and it's colder than the sea.

It is written: From the desert to the mountains they shall lead us,
By the hand and by the heart, they will comfort you and me.

In their innocence and trusting they will teach us to be free.

For the children and the flowers are my sisters and my brothers,
Their laughter and their loveliness would clear a cloudy day.

And the song that I am singing is a prayer to non-believers,
Come and stand beside us we can find a better way.

