

In Memoriam:

Harvi Griffin

December 14, 1936–August 9, 2005

by Elizabeth Huntley

Versatile jazz harpist Harvi Griffin died in Arizona in August. A native of Detroit, Harvi was the first man to be accepted into the famous harp department at Cass Technical High School for study with Velma Froude. After a two-year struggle to convince the school of his true interest in learning to play the harp, finally, in his senior year, he was allowed to begin lessons and found what was to be both his vocation and his avocation.

His quest for acceptance continued at college at Michigan State University. The faculty wanted him to major in music education while Harvi wanted to major in harp performance. Once again, thanks to his talent and his persistence, he prevailed and graduated with a performance degree. It was at college where he continued to study with Velma Froude, that Harvi began seriously to study jazz and popular music. Following college, Harvi earned his first masters degree from Michigan State and then moved to New York to further his classical harp study at Mannes with Lucile Lawrence, where he earned his second masters, and also at Eastman with Eileen Malone.

Harvi's long and busy professional life as a harpist included extended engagements in Detroit, Las Vegas, and Manila. He played with the U.S. Army Band. He appeared regularly at the White House performing for visiting dignitaries.

Following his Washington days, Harvi began a long career of touring. For years he maintained a hectic schedule, performing over one hundred concerts for eleven months out of twelve, driving himself and his harp all over the U.S. He loved all kinds of music and would program classical, country and western as well as his signature jazz on a concert. His theatrical sense, his timing and his commitment to excellence made his performances riveting. As he once said, "Drama is ninety percent of playing music." Some of that excitement can be heard on his recordings which include: *Harvi plus 3*, *The Harp and Voice of Harvi Griffin*, *The Two Sides of Harvi Griffin*, *Phase 3*, and *The Other Side*.

For the past fifteen years, Harvi Griffin lived in semi-retirement in Arizona. He taught both in Arizona and in Europe, traveling there regularly to teach and to perform. He continued to play some engagements and selected concerts, but no longer made the grueling tours around the U.S. He leaves his partner Lee Barr. ❀

