

HARMONIKIDS NEWSLETTER

December 2008



Greetings from Harmonikids!

2008 was another joyful year for Harmonikids. My sessions and workshops took Harmonikids to special kids all around the country, with an especially southern and bluesy flavor again this year.

Some highlights include...

... a return session with kids in Memphis' legendary Stax Records Music Academy. The wonderful Memphis Blues Guitarist Andy Cohen joined me to teach the Blues to these enthusiastic and talented kids. Harmonikids was honored to be invited back to participate in this special program Stax provides kids in Memphis (see above photo 4th from left). Gary was also invited to the Folk Alliance Conference to perform, give harmonica workshops, and appear as a guest speaker on two informative panels on teaching music to children. Many thanks to Cindy Cogbill, Louis Meyers and our friends at the Folk Alliance (<http://www.folk.org/www.folk.org>) who sponsored our return visit and been generous supporters of Harmonikids.

Later in February I was invited to return to Memphis to participate in the Blues Foundation's "Blues in the Schools" program (www.blues.org). The visit started with a television interview and guest appearance on WREG's popular morning show "Live at Nine". I worked with disadvantaged kids in seven Memphis area Middle Schools. Each was inspirational, but a special highlight was a rousing session in Elvis Presley's alma mater, Humes Middle School. The teacher later informed me that her students proudly used their new harmonica skills to perform a Blues song during Black History Week. Many thanks to Blues Foundation directors Jay Sieleman and Joe Whitmer for making this possible.

In June, I was invited to work with kids at Houston's "Project Row Houses" in sessions sponsored by my good friends at the Houston Blues Society. The kids were delighted

with the harmonicas, and eager to show off their new skills to their families and friends (see first photo). Warm thanks to Linda Kirschbaum and Lisa and Rich DelGrosso.

In July I returned to the NYC Ronald McDonald House for a harmonica lesson followed by a rockin' R&B concert for the kids with a group of New York musicians organized by longtime Harmonikids friend Chris Neuhoff. One participant was a little boy who in spite of his challenges (cancer treatments), joyfully played harmonica with the band... gleefully sang James Brown's "I Feel Good" (a soulful rendition that would have made the Godfather feel SO good) ... and then leapt out of his wheel chair to dance unselfconsciously... on his one leg. Needless to say, he was an inspiration to all; a reminder to focus on our abilities... not our disabilities. (See photo second from left)

In August I traveled back to Delaware for one of my favorite events, harmonica workshops at the Riverfront Blues Festival. The City of Wilmington has been a generous supporter for many years and featured me in a headline performance and CD release party for my "Many Shades of Blue". Heartfelt thanks especially to Tina Betz and Gene Fontana. This allowed me to return to the A.I. Dupont Hospital for Children for another spirited session with a bunch of kids in the playroom. Further, I returned to Ferris School for Boys to work with juveniles who put their hearts into learning, playing (and even rapping to) the blues including the late Bo Diddley's "I'm a Man". It was an intensely fun session I doubt any of us will forget. Bo would be proud!

August was also a great month for press. Harmonikids was featured in Northern Arizona University's Alumni Magazine. Many thanks to editor and friend, Anne Walden. Further, we had the honor of being featured as the top story in Exceptional Parent Magazine. To read this and other press see www.harmonikids.org.

My new CD "Many Shades of Blue" debuted at the top of the Blues Radio charts this summer, bringing more press recognition for Harmonikids in Blues Revue and Living Blues Magazines. I'd like to personally thank Bill Wax (XM Radio's Bluesville), The Blues Hound (KPFT) and Rick Jensen (WDEL) for inviting me to their stations in '08 for live interviews and performances and their interest in talking about my nonprofit work. Harmonikids also has a very strong presence in my segment of the wonderful harmonica documentary film "Pocket Full of Soul" which was released this year. See www.pocketfulofsoulmovie.com for more.

In October the Pasadena Levitt Pavilion sponsored a Harmonikids session with the children at Five Acres. Program for abused kids. Later that month, Susan Marks and the good folks at TASH NAU brought Harmonikids to Flagstaff Arizona for a truly wonderful session with special kids, families and friends (see photo third from left).

Very special thanks to our financial supporters and fundraisers this year including the IMTA, JMT-Barbizon, Eden Alpert and The Herb Alpert Foundation as well as private donations from many kind and generous individuals including Jack Newton, Jeff Nammacher, Lorraine Sykes, Dawn Frank, Dariush Maanayi, Danny Avery, Alyce, Don, and Stephen Allegretto. Special thanks to Barbara Belli for donating her wonderful web design and support.

This is just some of the terrific work and positive impact that Harmonikids had in the past year. Please pass this along to someone who may be interested in reading about and supporting Harmonikids. Your support and assistance makes it all possible.

Kind regards for the New Year and always,

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Gary's Press Kit and info about his music are at: www.sonicbids.com/garyallegretto
Gary's CD's are available at: www.cdbaby.com



www.harmonikids.org

A 501(c)3 tax-deductible charitable organization

"By teaching special children to play the harmonica, I have seen the tremendous benefits children receive by focusing on their abilities - not their disabilities. I have discovered that the healing power of music can be found... right under a kids nose."

~Gary Allegretto, Founding Director

"I am heartily supportive of Harmonikids...we have seen the power of music in transforming young lives. Gary Allegretto and his work are most worthy of support."

~Dan Aykroyd ("Elwood Blues")