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Text in the City® Newsletter

Ron Feuer

Musician Extraordinaire

By Andrea Alvarado



Ron Feuer is an amazing musician whose career spans more than 50 years, and he's performed with legends the likes of Diana Ross, Paul Anka, Elvis Presley, Ann-Margret, Frank Sinatra Jr., and jazz greats such as James Moody, Randy Brecker, Ernie Watts and many more. Ron lives right in our own backyard!

Before going into his incredible background, I have to first tell you how I was lucky enough to meet him. As many of my readers know, my community involvement escalated to an outreach movement called Northridge Sparkle Campaign. It gained so much momentum that volunteers from all over the San Fernando Valley joined us in our efforts to bring back the luster to the old Northridge Business District on Reseda Boulevard. Okay, enough about me, but through this effort, one of the volunteers who found us was a lady named Rusty Feuer who had been trying on her own for many years to make a difference in an area of Northridge South of Roscoe Boulevard.

Rusty and I became friends. She also has a surprisingly remarkable background as a model, and showgirl in Las Vegas. You know immediately by looking at her 5'9" stature, long blond hair and pretty face that she's somebody special.

Rusty invited me to her home to look at some plants she wanted to donate to the "boulevard." To say I was surprised is an understatement! Not only is she an amazing gardener with flowers and shrubs filling a spacious courtyard, she suggested that I meet her husband, Ron, in his music studio.

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Walking into the studio, you first see gold records hanging ornamentally on the walls. My eyes then catch the majestic grand piano and Hammond B3 organ filling the room with a powerful ambiance. In a corner is a keyboard and lots of technical equipment. Behind the desk sits Ron viewing a computer screen and working at the keyboard. He tries to explain to me how computers can do so much these days: you can play chords, and the computer reads notes, and how a computer is an instrument itself...all above and beyond my computer knowledge. However, I am intrigued and listen intently as he rattles off how computers are pushing the boundaries of how musicians make electronic music today. Then, I'm privy to a ring-side seat to his partial resume including his performances with Elvis. What I found out about his career and how he met Rusty fascinated me, and I wanted to know more about this intriguing person. Hence, an interview was set-up and he told me his story.

Ron was born in the Bronx, NY in 1941. His mother was a singer and his father also possessed musical talent. His Godmother lived in a nearby apartment and she'd play records for him and she played the piano. Music was an integral part of young Ron's world. He started playing piano when he was about 5 years old. At the age of 9, he started playing the accordion, which he states emphatically that he hated. Nevertheless, he became an accordion virtuoso; he could read and play anything. Because his parents

considered him a child prodigy, they were going to send him to study with Joe Biviano, one of the top accordionists in the world. Instead, they moved to Dobbs Ferry on the Hudson River in Westchester County. In Dobbs Ferry, he lived near a music store. One day he sat down at the piano in the store, and to make a long story short, he never picked up the accordion again.

Feuer began studying piano with be-bopper, Vic Kenmore, and soon found himself interested in jazz and listening to radio stations geared to the jazz format. "The music from Birdland used to be on the radio at midnight. New York's Birdland was a hotbed for jazz, and all the big names of jazz performed there. In time, I learned to improvise and started developing my own style of re-harmonizing. At night I would go to bed and I would visualize notes and chords, and hear them in my head. Somehow I just got it! Before I knew it, everything just registered."

Ron's family moved to California when he was 16, and he moved away from home. "I didn't get along with my dad, and I didn't want to live with that type of suppression, so I moved out. I lived with a family in the Hollywood Hills, while I went to High School, and performed three nights a week playing jazz music. Having no car, I would hitch hike to gigs. I rarely ever went to school on Fridays, because I usually couldn't get up. I was performing late nights at local clubs Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays."

By the time Ron turned 17, he did

his own album for a company called Del-Fi Records owned by Bob Keane, a clarinet player who had taken over Artie Shaw's Band. Keane was most famous for signing Richie Valens, and Valens' hits Donna and La Bamba brought notability to the label.

"What happened was an old friend of mine, Ron Rich, a singer and actor who I'm still in touch with, had an audition with Del-Fi Records, and I went with him. The studio where he auditioned had an organ. I sat down and started to play. Bob Keane signed me instead of him. Keane wanted to put out some jazz music, and so I signed a 3-year contract and he produced my first album. It turned out to be the pick of the week on The Johnny Magnus Show, host of a local radio station, and every hour they announced 'this 17 year-old genius.' As luck would have it, within 6-months I was working for Keane's



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company as a shipping clerk, shipping my own albums out for \$2.00 an hour!"

When Ron was 18, he met his first wife, a young girl two years his senior, fell in love and moved in with her. She had two daughters from a previous marriage, Tammy and Debbie, both babies at the time. They eventually married and had three more children together. It was the early 60s and they had a nice apartment in North Hollywood, a decent car (no car insurance), and they often went out to eat. "In those days, you could live comfortably on less than \$400 a month. To be honest, I don't live any differently nowadays, except at this point we have a big house.

I was a kid with a family to feed. I've always been a musician, but now had a family to take care of and needed to make sure I could support them. The main thing was just having gigs. I worked a coffee house called Capriccio's, six nights a week for \$5 a night, \$7 on weekends. Then, I got a raise to \$48 a week, and it was enough to pay our bills. In 1960, I worked a burlesque show at a venue called The York Club at the corner of Western and Florence in Los Angeles, and Sherry's on the Strip, a famous jazz club. We were doing fine."

At Sherry's he was introduced to an assortment of musicians and went on the road, wife and kids in tow, and played in a variety of pubs and clubs eventually winding up in Las Vegas.

"In Vegas when I was in my 20s, I became a more well rounded musician. I worked with all types of celebrities, including some really great black acts.

I've been told I'm a white guy who plays with a black feel. I consider that a big compliment. I also became an excellent accompanist, and I was fortunate enough to work with Ann-Margret, Marie Osmond, Paul Anka, Elvis and so many more. I was one of the few Vegas guys who commuted regularly to L.A. for studio work, recordings and TV.

As a modern-type jazz player, my reputation grew. People started hearing about me and it got to the point I was playing so many gigs I barely ever slept. I'd go to bed at 3, 4, 5 or 6 in the morning. When I awoke I'd practice a couple of hours, and then jam 3 or 4 afternoons a week. At night, I'd work 2 or 3 different shows running from gig to gig.

Rick Davis, Santo Savino, "Papito" Hernandez, and myself formed a quartet, and in 1971 we recorded the album *Spirit Free Plays Starship*. In fact, the Numero Company, out of Chicago, just

re-released the album on CD, which includes a 12-page booklet about our background and music development."

Despite Ron Feuer's grueling schedule, he and his group created a new sound that challenged the trends of current popular jazz at that time. Not only has he played in live performances and recordings with legends such as Diana Ross, Paul Anka, Elvis Presley, Gladys Knight and Ann-Margret, and many jazz greats, his talent ranges from pianist, keyboardist, B3 organist, composer, arranger and producer!

His marriage to his first wife lasted long enough for him to realize it wasn't working. "We divorced and I received custody of all five children. For several years, I raised them by myself.

After my divorce, I started going out with different women for the first time in my life. One night I went into the Desert Inn lounge where I'd been working. I had a band for a show called The Daily Dirt. When I walked in, I saw this comedian I knew with a group of his friends. Rusty was sitting with them. I knew who she was through friends of mine, and knew she was one of the showgirls. The next day, I looked her name up in the phone book, and I called her. We were on the phone for 3 or 4 hours! That was kind of it; we started hanging out.

During this period, I started traveling again. I had five kids and a housekeeper-nanny. Rusty and I got closer and closer. This continued for another year and a half. I started thinking, when am I really happy? It was when I was with Rusty. Then, Rusty stunned me with the news that she she was pregnant! We weren't living together. Rusty had her



Rusty, then Taylor, at the Sahara in Las Vegas in 1968



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Ron with fellow musician
Joe Moscheo



own house, but we decided to give it a try. There was a lot to contend with...I had five kids, and now with Rusty, that meant six! And there was still the ex-wife to deal with."

Ron and Rusty were married by a strip Chaplain named Jim Reid, and Paul Anka threw a big party for the couple at the Bacchanal Restaurant in Caesar's Palace. In the beginning, it was rough for everyone involved. "Rusty was great; she was taking care of the kids, and pretty soon I got busier and busier and I started making real good money."

To describe what his life was like then means writing a separate book. His stories are amazing, his friendships lasting and his talent unprecedented. The inside stories about his relationships with Ann-Margret, Paul Anka, Diana Ross and musicians he knew and played with are so colorful, they need to be written separately from this newsletter.

The 1983 concert in Central Park with Diana Ross was a highlight and will forever go down in music and concert history. Torrential rain threatened to shut down the event, but all the performers continued and the two-day concert turned into two melodramatic evenings.

Ron has photographs of superstars, private moments with celebrities and a scrapbook filled with memories of an extraordinary life. "Here I am. This is the Motown 25th Anniversary TV Show. That's me. We're all named and numbered. Here's Michael Jackson, Dick Clark, Diana Ross, Richard Pryor, Marvin Gaye, everybody."

Ron hasn't stopped. To his credit, he has been all over the world. A few years ago, he toured with Frank Sinatra Jr. to Brazil, up to the Amazon. He's been traveling for 14 years with the Elvis Presley In Concert tour, an astounding production with a live orchestra on stage with a state of the art video projecting footage of Elvis on a large screen. It's like you're at a real Elvis concert. From the first song it's magic. The big screen show will be touring throughout Europe for 4 weeks in March 2012. A few years ago, he was on a Grammy nominated R&B song with Jazmine Sullivan called "*Bust Your Windows*," on her Fearless album, and many years ago was the pianist on Diana Ross and the Supremes' *Farewell* double album. Ron was also the featured jazz piano soloist on the soundtrack for the award-winning movie, *Sideways*.

Feuer comes from a creative stock and many of his relatives are in the arts. His cousin Deborah Nadoolman is married to John Landis, the director. She is the President of the Costume Designer's Guild, she's been nominated for an Academy Award for *Coming to America*, and she did the costumes for the original *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

Jon Peters, the producer, is his first wife's cousin. Sid and Marty Kroft, the puppeteers and producers, are his cousins, and Morey Amsterdam is a distant cousin. His daughter Debra, an actress, was married to Mickey Rourke, and daughter Tammy was a dancer in the Casino de Paris show in Vegas. His son Ron Feuer, born Ronald Patrick Jay Feuer, is also in the music industry and is a record producer, composer and film producer. Often, there is a misconception as to which Ron did what. "People call me to congratulate my son, and I say, 'Hey, that was me, not him.'"

Rusty's cousin is Donald Trump, and Rusty is the "last of the Sands Copa Girls." In the 50s, Sands Copa Girls were the premiere entertainment at one of the hottest show places in the country, The Sands Hotel in Las Vegas, home of the Rat Pack...a story in itself!

Ron is still going strong, but wouldn't want to work the way he did when he was younger. He says he worked like a dog, and besides nowadays his recovery time isn't the same. "Like today, I played with a 29 year-old bass player. It was pretty intense with a band and all, and I definitely feel it afterwards.

These days, I'm becoming more computer educated. There are all these new tools. It's a constant learning process. And I still love what I do...more than ever!"

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Ron Feuer Discography

Forgotten Dreams (2012)

Ron Feuer featuring John Tegmeyer - Original jazz compositions

Meditations (2012)

Ernie Watts

Ladies (2012)

Walt Johnson featuring Frank Sinatra Jr. - Light jazz

Spirit Free Plays Starship (2011)

Jazz quartet

White Harvest (2011)

Sowing the Seeds - Christian Rock

Changes (2009)

Frank Marocco - Jazz

Fearless (2008)

Jazmine Sullivan - Urban contemporary

Christmas Album (2008 - CD re-issue)

Ron Feuer

Gospel Side of Elvis (2003)

Imperials and the Stamps Quartet

Reflections (2001)

Ernie Watts and Ron Feuer - Jazz duets for saxophone and piano

Katewalk (2000)

Lew Del Gatto - Jazz

Moon Trip (2000)

Raoul Romero and his All Star Jazz Orchestra

GEM: A Dangerous First Impression (1999)

Ron Feuer, Abraham Laboriel, Harry Blazer - Jazz Trio

When Love Whispers Your Name (1999)

Ron Feuer featuring George Young - Original meditative compositions

Man With The Guitar (1997 - re-release)

Herb Ellis - Jazz

Bolero Fantasy (1991)

Ron Feuer and Liv Khalsa - Invincible Recordings

Bliss of Freedom (1990)

Ron Feuer - Original versions of East Indian chants - Syda Foundation

Music





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Originally known as “Jualita” and built in 1907 by wealthy Omaha, Nebraska banker Gurdon Wattles as a vacation home, this mansion showcases all the grace and glamour of a bygone era, and became one of the city’s first tourist attractions before the movies arrived. The Wattles Mansion was built by Myron Hung and Elmer Grey, the legendary Los Angeles-area architects, who were also responsible for designing the Ambassador Hotel, The Huntington Art Gallery, Pasadena’s Wentworth Hotel (now the Langham), Occidental College, the California Institute of Technology, and Beverly Hills Hotel.

The Wattles Mansion



Above exterior, and below in 1913

The Wattles’ 49 acre estate featured 6,167 square feet of living space, seven bedrooms, seven bathrooms, a wood-paneled library with a hand-painted ceiling, black and white checkerboard marble flooring, terracotta tile terrace, wood-beamed ceilings, and a full basement. Wattles was responsible for gradually transforming the 49 acres of agricultural land into orchards, thematic gardens and naturalistic landscapes. The estate has been split into several areas, including the Wattles Mansion, Wattles Park and Wattles Gardens and has been recognized as the only remaining intact example of the once plentiful Hollywood estates when Hollywood was primarily agricultural.

After Wattles’ death in 1932, his wife and his son continued to live on the property. Gurdon Wallace Wattles, Jr. negotiated the sale of the residence to the City of Los Angeles in 1965. The City of Los Angeles Board of Recreation and Parks Commission subsequently designated the Wattles estate as an acquisition area, and purchased the property for \$1,917,000 in June 1968.

Sadly, the city lacked the money necessary to maintain the large estate and it quickly fell in a serious state of disrepair. In the 1980s, crime at the park increased, and druggies and homeless took over the tea house. Vandalism and a couple of fires finally destroyed the tea house, and only a small portion is

still standing. Heavy flooding overflowed the small lake and stream, drying them up forever. Some of the palm trees had to be cut down. The place became unkempt as a result of cutbacks, and graffiti was reported on the white columns. Then in 1984 the mansion and grounds were managed by Hollywood Heritage, Inc., which strived with limited funds to restore and maintain the property and present it as one of the city’s premier show-places.

Over the first decade of the 80s, volunteers of the Hollywood Heritage organization removed several feet of mud from the garden, replanted landscaping, and repainted and refinished the interior wood-work. Through their dedicated



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efforts, the Wattles Mansion was returned to its original state.

After neighbors reported late night parties in 2008, loud amplified music and cars blocking the street, and stated that the property was not being properly maintained, Hollywood Heritage was served an eviction notice by the city of Los Angeles without the courtesy of a discussion or phone call. Hollywood Heritage denied the allegations, but ultimately agreed to vacate the mansion in May 2009.

Since the departure of Hollywood Heritage, the City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks is maintaining the house once again. The property is now made up of three separate areas. The 4.2 acres which was

turned into a community garden in 1975, has been continuously maintained by local residents. It is private and not open to the public. The Wattles Garden Park is open to the public daily from dusk to dawn. The mansion and formal garden area is not open to the public, but is available for use as a special event and wedding venue.

Although the formal gardens are not accessible to the public, that area once again appears to be in a sad state of disrepair. Don't you just love what happens to anything the city takes over?? According to a sign posted on the premises, a restoration is currently in progress. Hopefully, it won't look that way for long. Located at 1824 North Curson Avenue, Hollywood, CA 90046 ***





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That Man

Sy and Leslie Kaplan



By Leslie Kaplan

Leslie Kaplan today



I sleep alone now, but the scent of my man still lingers on his pillow. It's on the empty side of my bed. It smells of Old Spice after-shave and sweat.

Oh...that man! I still feel him beside me. The one who left his mark on this pillow. That man had a tenderness to his touch. A tenderness that moved across my breasts like a warm summer breeze, caressing my heart.

Kisses like chocolate...chocolate kisses, still lingers on my lips.

Although a thousand and one nights have passed

since that man laid his head on his pillow...

Your scent still quickens me! I am wild and untamed as I follow your scent no matter where it may lead.

still...to me...it was but yesterday. Your scent still quickens me! I am wild and untamed as I follow your scent no matter where it may lead. I smell...I feel...I see....I hear...I touch...and...I taste that man coming home as he calls out in this baritone voice.

"Honey, I'm here." I run to the door...but no one is there.

I sleep alone now...but the scent of my man...still lingers on this pillow.

I love you!



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A NEW YEAR WISH!

Life is fragile and ever-changing. Progress is good, but we boomers remember a simpler time. A time when our cities were clean and not so overcrowded. Small businesses flourished and mom and pop stores exploded everywhere. We went shopping at five-and-dime stores like F.W. Woolworth's and when we were through filling our shopping bags, we sat at a soda fountain and bought BLT's (bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwiches) with chips and an ice cream float for \$1.50 without thinking of gaining a pound or feeling we had spent too much for too little.



We wish our children could have just a little of what we experienced. Many of us

grew up when our communities were considered rustic countryside's. The San Fernando Valley was mainly citrus farms. When my family moved to North Hollywood in 1953, going to where I live today in Northridge, was like taking a vacation – an all day event to petting zoos and horse ranches.



Our cars were distinguishable. Of course we were younger, but even today when our minds aren't as quick, they would never get lost in a parking lot. You could identify a Chevy from a Ford without batting an eye.



Above-Broadway in Topanga Plaza, circa 1965

I'm using this space to go back in time a little and remind those out there who can still remember what it was like to grow up knowing your neighbor and having pride in your community, to slow down and smell the roses.

Yes, I'm using an old cliché here. My hope for 2012 is that the Northridge Sparkle Campaign spreads its infectious spirit and reaches those businesses that want their clientele to grow, and teaches those still throwing trash in the street, that it is toxic waste that will eventually pollute the air and damage them and their children. It takes two minutes to clean up in front of a business venue. It takes seconds to find a trash bin. If we're handed lemons, let's make lemonade. For those still doing graffiti, as punishment, let them create art somewhere, someplace where it will beautify. God knows we need more art!

My wish for all of you in the new year of 2012 is that you catch the "Sparkle" fever, and join those that want to make our world a better place.

