

Pacific Garden  
Mall - 1980 Oct 16 - 1989

Text and Photography by Harvey Gotliffe

In 16th century Europe, the average person's only contact with entertainment came from wandering *joglars* performing in town or at fairs. These jugglers, storytellers, acrobats, singers and musicians barely squeezed out a living, often went hungry and usually were denied any legal protection.

Things are better in Santa Cruz where that 400-year-old tradition lives on in Pacific Garden Mall as itinerant and stable musicians and singers try to coax a reasonable tip for their performances from passersby.

At first glance, you might be wary of Daniel Beausejour with his straggly beard, unkempt hair and menacing smile caused by three rotting front teeth. But he's really a gentle soul, his husky singing voice mesmerizing strollers as he plays his guitar through a set of Dylan, Pink Floyd and the Beatles.

**Saxophonist Sunji Almad believes his music reminds people of better times.**



"It's hard to have this life anywhere else," says the Quebec native, who came to Santa Cruz 11 years ago at the age of 19. "So many beautiful people walk by." Daniel smiles and exchanges a "hello" with a long-haired blonde woman who walks by his spot in front of Palace Art and Office Supply.

Daniel starts playing around 10:30 in the morning. Placing his battered top hat upside down on the ground to collect tips, he primes his audience with a sign that encourages donations. He receives change, dollar bills, fives "from people trying to impress their friends." Once he was given \$35. Thursdays through Sundays are best, he says, "Monday and Tuesday, people seem to walk by with their hands in their pockets." When the morning set ends around noon and the day is sunny, Daniel is off to the beach, returning when the weather cools down.

He's never taken lessons and barely reads music, but after listening to a song, Daniel practices it until it becomes part of his musical repertoire. If the mall is quiet, he earns money doing childcare work or gardening, but he enjoys making music best.

"Look, I'm my own boss, it's lots of fun, and I can do it," he laughs, "but there's really a bad medical and insurance plan." A grin fills his tanned, bearded face. "I'm openly looking for a manager who'll have these teeth fixed and put me on the stage."

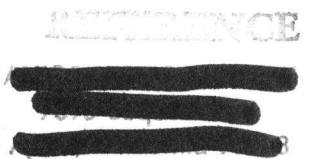
Michael Perreira doesn't mind his sidewalk ledge stage for now, as he sits strumming his guitar in the sun, wearing a faded purple bandana around his head. He'd rather be playing African highlife music and reggae with his group Kosono, and at 35, he relies on landscape work to pay the bills, coming to the mall for other reasons. "I come here every so often to watch the ladies go by. Don't make much money," he confesses.

But the mall has been special for Michael. "It has helped me get over my fear of playing in front of people," he says, going through a set of Bob Marley's reggae music and old Elvis rhythm and blues pieces.

A stranger stops, sits beside Michael and begins playing a harmonica. But Michael is looking for better accompaniment with his eight- to 10- piece group at O.T. Price's. "I'd like to make it playing music if I could," he says softly, "But I rely more on my gardening."

## MAKING MUSIC ON THE MALL

16 Monterey Life, June 1989



MONTEREY LIFE  
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**Although 70-year-old Pete Moyer is blind himself, he plays gospel music to raise money for people less fortunate.**

A car drives by with a roaring exhaust followed by a pickup truck saturating the air with noisy music, and Michael ruminates for a moment, "They should make it a walking mall with more plants."

Plenty of plants line the outdoor display in front of Woolworth's, where Pete Moyer plays his gospel music. At 70, he's one of several older musicians who occasionally come to the mall. Pete brings a complete set-up with him—a chair, microphone, speakers and an amplified guitar. A wicker basket sits in the open guitar case inviting donations, while a compelling sign attached to the lid reads, "I PLAY FOR THE BLIND."

Although Pete is blind himself, he plays in the mall and at flea markets "to raise money for people less fortunate. I do it to help others," he says in a twangy, captivating voice that rolls on beautifully when he sings. He's been blind since 1980. "It was just after Mt. St. Helen's," he says. "Got to see it blow up."

Born in New York City, Pete served in the navy for four years, and stayed in Portland for 42 years after being discharged. His six children are scattered from California and Oregon to Alaska, while he lives in Capitola.

Pete reminisces about his earlier days in the Midwest: "Sang honky-tonk tunes on CBS radio out of St. Louis. I was even Bozo the Clown. From the ridiculous to the sublime," he smiles warmly, "I done it all."

When he isn't playing himself, he comes to hear other musicians on the mall. "I come to listen and see who's playing. If you got competition, it's better." Pete has been trying to get a gospel band together, but nobody is interested," he laments. Then he works his way through a rendition of "A Closer Walk with Thee" with such honesty and love that Willie Nelson would be proud to harmonize alongside. As the song comes to a close he smiles for a moment, "You know, I enjoy what I do." So, evidently, does a mother

whose three-year-old daughter timidly scurries to Pete's wicker basket and drops in some change. "My husband was a street musician and I appreciate what he's doing," says the mother, looking at Pete, "It's great someone that old is playing like this."

Pete is resplendent in a powder blue shirt with red and blue flowers embroidered on the pockets, a matching light blue hat sitting jauntily on his thin, suntanned head, neat grey slacks, light blue socks, shiny loafers, and dark wraparound sunglasses. He seems to be the epitome of the kind of entertainer and entertainment even the most conservative store owner would love to have around. But not today.

Santa Cruz policeman John Galli sits next to Pete and says there's been a complaint. Pete's gentle, but amplified, sounds are bothering a store owner. Galli talks calmly, asking Pete for his name and birthdate, telling him that anyone using amplification on the mall or in their homes needs a permit. Pete just turns the sound off and keeps on strumming and singing in his deep, melodic voice.

Street musicians do get hassled by the police at times, says Daniel. "Every once in a while, a new cop comes along and wants to establish himself on the scene," he explains. One gave him a trespassing ticket, but his lawyer convinced the judge that Daniel was playing music and not trespassing, so the fine was suspended.

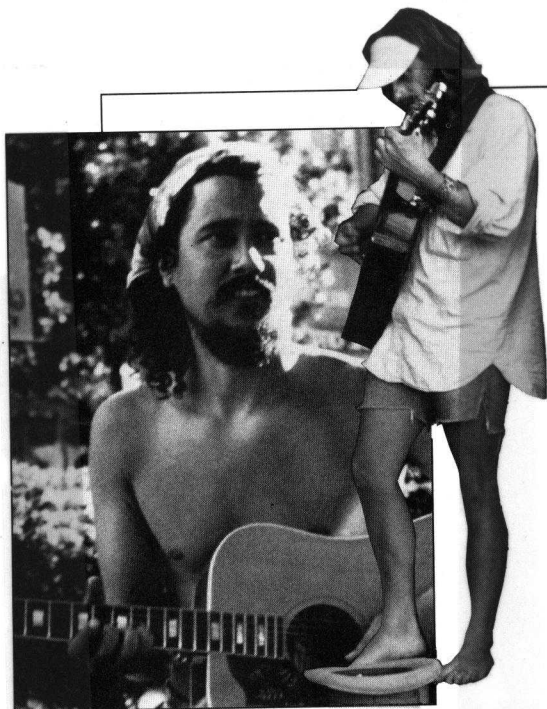
A four-year veteran, Galli likes working the mall. "I've been on the beat for nine months," he says. "Musicians are no problem. They provide a real added flavor to the mall. They got some bad musicians here, but they also got some good ones."

He may have been talking about Sunji Ahmad, a former minister, who is a fine tenor saxophonist using the mall as a resting spot in a long journey that began in Trinidad 38 years ago. The tall, lanky, dark-skinned islander grew up surrounded by steel band music and made his own steel drum at age three. By the time he moved to New York City at 18, music was already his life, and would one day be his livelihood.

Sunji's territory is an alcove near the Del Mar Theatre, where he wails out a Charlie Parker song or one of his own, attracting more passersby than the pied piper of Hamlin.

In a lilting accented voice that's softer than an island breeze, Sunji captivates you with his knowledge of music, discussing the influence of classical masters like Beethoven on his jazz, as well as Parker, Coleman Hawkins, "the subtle creativity" of Lester Young and Clifford Brown's "sweetness."

Sunji studied sax in New York, taking private lessons from a teacher who had been



**Musicians Michael Perreira (left) and Daniel Beausejour mesmerize strollers of the mall.**

Parker's mentor, and the studying has paid off in his own music which he plays reluctantly. "I hide my songs between other tunes—disguise them," he says. "There's too many pirates around." But Sunji readily plays his tunes for the children. "They like it. Their eyes perk up."

With a white beret, Sunji has a "Paris in the 1950s" look, and loves the saxophone. "It helps me express my musical ideas," he explains. "I want to fluently say what I play. The saxophone incorporates my breathing. Besides," he laughs softly, "I don't like to lug a heavy instrument around."

Sunji has played professionally in San Francisco but would like to start a four-piece combo in the area, "bringing back old-time jazz," he says wistfully. "Something's missing in jazz today—the spontaneity. Some young musicians are very rigid, uptight, careful. That carefree element is missing."

But not from Sunji, who is pleased that the people like his "licks." He believes his music reminds them of better times—"gets them in a good mood." Whether he gets a victory sign from someone who can't afford to donate anything, or a dollar or more from a more affluent jazz aficionado, Sunji likes the mall. "It keeps me in touch with the people," he says. "I can see if I'm accepted or rejected."

The Santa Cruz musical tradition may not be as old as the *joglars* in the medieval days, but the variety of offerings from jazz, gospel, country and western, folk and Mexican music gives everyone a choice of entertainers making music on the mall.