

# From Haberdasher to Harpman, Jim Schoberg is tailor-made to play!

By CP Christopher Peppas

It stands to reason that, after thirty-eight years at the helm of J. Roberts Menswear in Elkhorn, that Jim Schoberg would know a little bit about a perfect fit. And Schoberg's all about fitting in.

When it comes to his own gigs, sitting in at a musical jam or ten or just adding that little something extra at friends' shows, Jim is like "Have Harmonica, Will Travel."

Jim would be the first to admit that he's a bit of a late took his sweet time to get to where he is today. Schoberg has turned the sit-in into an art form.



"It's a neat story and a bit of a fluke," Jim said when talking about he lit upon the mouth organ as his instrument of choice. "I had no musical background whatsoever," Schoberg explained. "One day, my son came over with a harmonica and left it with me 'to fool around with it a little.'"



And fool around, he did. "I wasn't very good as first and I never played around (wife) Marilyn," Jim explained. "I played in the car for two years. I played on the lawn tractor. I played in the house. I played in the basement."

He took his newly honed skill on the road and started the journey that led him here today. And when I say road, I mean T-H-E R-O-A-D! Jim played his first time in front of people at a castle in Ireland.

And, just about every winter, the Schobergs make their way to sunny Mexico, where he has been playing with some of the same musicians for twenty years. "This works out to hundreds of people over the years," Jim said. "I've played on many of their recordings and countless gigs," he added.

The harp is the best choice for Schoberg because "I just love to play with different people and in different genres. And his influences are just as varied. From the Rock & Rollers like Neil Young and Bruce Springsteen to the west coast Chicago Blues style of William Clarke to Madison's West Side Andy and "one of the best harmonica players of all time: Sonny Terry."

A couple of other pieces to this musical pastiche are definitely the Country touch of Mickey Raphael, who played alongside Willie Nelson for a bunch of years, wailing away on his Hohner Echo Harp and last (but certainly in no way least): Stevie Wonder.



Schoberg remembers being mesmerized when seeing Stevie on the Ed Sullivan Show when they were both young teenagers.

In addition to Mexico, Ireland, Scotland and England, Jim has played all over Asia as his two sons have lived and worked in Thailand for a few years. A recent trip for a son's wedding had him harping in the former Siam (natch), Cambodia and Vietnam among others.

He finally got around to playing in The States in 2005, starting at the venerable Caroline's. "I was going there twice a week," Jim said. "I played with The Big O, Harvey Westmoreland and the cool cat behind the kit, Paul Spencer, who has held forth on the weekends since there was a Caroline's.

"He taught me so much," Schoberg said of Spencer. "I have to give him credit. It was unreal." At one point, Spencer told him to "play some jazz...and so, I did."

I strongly urge everyone to go to the jams and the various gigs to see Jim and hear him play. Better yet, start your own group, book a gig and then look to your right. You might just see (and hear) Jim Schoberg 'sitting-in.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** CP Christopher Peppas is a journalist, jazz vocalist and conga player in the Greater Milwaukee area and Correspondent at Large for the *Jazz Unlimited Newsletter* and a Field Editor for *Our Wisconsin Magazine*.