

# ***TOM's* Been a *SORCE* of Entertainment for Six Decades (and Counting)!**

by CP Christopher Peppas

There are usually some common threads on the paths to music for the featured subjects on these pages month after month.

They typically got started listening to the jazz greats on their grandparents' or parents' records. Or, started taking lessons with some of the more renowned teachers in our area. A large percentage matriculated at one time or graduated from the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music.

But the saga of Tom Sorce has provided a first for our readers. We begin our story with Tom joining the U.S. Army, specifically the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division (aka Air Assault, Screaming Eagles).

It takes place in the Mojave Desert, of all things, from 1962-65.



As fate would have it, one of Tom Sorce's barrack mates was Steve Petch, a New York-based studio musician and guitar player of some note who worked with Dion & The Belmonts and B.B. King among several others.

"He (Petch) taught me a lot," Sorce said of his time back then. "It was just me, Steve and twelve black guys," Tom mused. "Just a lot of joking and singing." And a lot of passing the time playing guitar. "Those were some fun times," Sorce said.

Tom had been playing in a band in high school for dances and the like. But the association with Petch most certainly turned things up a notch.

After his discharge, Sorce returned to Milwaukee and started taking lessons from Don Momblow at The Conservatory (ah, there it is!) and also Manty Ellis, who is still on the scene at the age of ninety-three.

Sorce recently ran into Ellis at a fete for the latter at Sam Belton's Club on MLK, Jr. Drive. Tom ambled over to where Manty was sitting and Manty said: "I finally found a guy who walks worse than I do."

For twenty years, Tom played with Tom Anthony, a great lounge singer, at State Fair with Sig Millonzi, Festa Italiana, church festivals and every conceivable venue. Add to that some stints with Las Vegas legend Dick Eliot, The Fabulous Bobby Way,





Al White, Kim Marie and Jayne Taylor for Christmas Shows at the Sunset Playhouse.

The list of notables that Sorce has played with and for reads like a musical Who's Who. Al Martino, Phil Ford & Mimi Hines and locally, George Bus-ateri.

For several years, Tom was the booker for the Italian Community Center's Courtyard Summer Music Series. He manned the six-string with Janet Planet, Suzanne Grzanna, Kim Marie and Oldies but Goodies Spectacular.

He even hired the octogenarians in Generation Gap a few times. That group featured a young, wickedly good looking singer. "They had a good thing going there (ICC)," Tom recalled. "They kept cutting down on the budget

"I still enjoy it," Sorce said. "The more I play, the younger I feel. I look forward to it so much." Tom has had to curtail his playing out in recent months. "My wife has dementia," Tom revealed. "So I don't play out at night anymore to take care of her. If her sisters or friends come to stay with her, then maybe I'll play a gig."

Tom also held forth with a variety of groups playing at The Villages in Florida. And he even opened for a Rockabilly group that was regularly featured on Austin City Limits

Early on in his career he played out as a duo with the notable late, great George Pritchett.

Tom Sorce is proud of his Italian heritage and cites Louie Prima as his main musical influence.

It is not hyperbole to say that, square mile for square mile, Italy, the little country in the middle of Europe, has made the biggest contribute to music and the arts in history.

Names like Verdi, Vivaldi, Rossini, La Scala and Commedia dell'arte. Of course, Volta helped with electricity, Marconi invented radio and when it comes to opera tenors, Enrico Caruso begat Luciano Pavarotti who begat Andrea Bocelli.

There are many more, too many more to mention here.

Suffice it to say, that of you get the chance to see and hear Tom Sorce, you will be thoroughly entertained as people have been for six decades and counting.



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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