

Greg Howard
July 26, 1964 - April 22, 2023

— Written by Joyce Howard —

Chapman Stick player, musician, composer and artist Gregory “Greg” Bernard Howard, 58, passed peacefully on Saturday, April 22, 2023, at his home in Charlottesville, Virginia, after a brave fight against pancreatic cancer. His wife held his hand as he departed this earth.

Greg was born on July 26, 1964 in Washington D.C. He grew up in McLean, Virginia and began his exploration with sound and music at a very young age. He learned to play the organ, clarinet and saxophone while still in elementary school and began making improvisational recordings at age 14.

Greg attended McLean High School and continued to cultivate his love of music. He was the drum major for the marching band and was also a member of the jazz ensemble. He performed on stage with the theatre group starring in “The Girlfriend” and “Twelfth Night” launching his performance career. He formed several musical collaborations while in high school, most notably the “Continental Drift”. Greg graduated high school in 1982.

Greg was accepted to the University of Virginia in Charlottesville and graduated in 1986 with his B.A. in English. He loved languages and words and was both an elegant speaker and writer. He had a sharp wit, quick humor, and never ran out of puns.

After graduating UVA and inspired by his late father’s love of music, he chose to follow his passion for making his own music and embarked on his career as an artist and composer. Greg discovered the Chapman Stick in 1985 while attending a King Crimson concert. He described himself at the time as “a frustrated keyboard player” and immediately recognized the Stick as the instrument that would allow him to fully express his music in the way he experienced it.

Greg lived in Los Angeles and Santa Fe, New Mexico for brief periods, but made Charlottesville his home. Greg often said his music was a product of the Charlottesville music scene, which included a strong jazz and improvisational movement lead by musicians like John D’earth and guitarist Tim Reynolds. Greg contributed to the formative period of the Dave Matthews Band. He collaborated with them on stage and in the studio and performed on the platinum CD *Before These Crowded Streets*.

Under his own Espresso record label, Greg released 14 titles including *Shapes* (1994); *Code Magenta* (1995) - Greg’s iconic trio with vocalist Dawn Thompson and DMB saxophonist LeRoi Moore; *Sol* (1997) with John D’earth, Tim Reynolds, Robert Jospé, Darrell Rose, Kevin Davis, Jeff Decker, and Dawn Thompson; and *The Holly and the Ivy, Classic Christmas Selections* (2017) with flutist Angela Kelly. Greg and Tim Reynolds released several improvisational recordings under the name of “Sticks and

Stones". In 2014 Greg released *AZUL*, a live studio improvisation with D'earth and drummer Brian Caputo.

In 1999, he formed the Greg Howard Band working with several gifted musicians from Holland: Jan Wolfkamp, Jan van Olffen and Hubert Heeringa. *Lift* was recorded in Holland and released early in 2000. The band had three tours in the US the same year. Greg completed remastering *Lift* just a few weeks before his passing. This was a legacy project for him as he wanted his listeners to experience this music in the way he heard it with a richer and much larger range sonically than the original mix.

As a soloist, Greg released three CDs, including *Stick Figures* (1993, remastered 2003), a defining work of solo Stick composition and performance, and two live improvisational CDs, *Water on the Moon* (1998) and *Ether Ore* (2005).

Greg was an active teacher of Chapman's Free Hands method, having written numerous books on playing the Stick which include: *The Stick Book™, volume 1*, 1997, *The Greg Howard Songbook*, 2009, and *Tapping Into Bach*, 2021. He taught dozens of Stick seminars around North America, Europe and Japan, as well as teaching at the Interlochen Center for the Arts and the Berklee College of Music. Greg wrote many articles on the subject of the Stick and the Free Hands method, with articles published in *Progression* and *Bass Frontiers* Magazines, and on the stick.com website.

Over the span of Greg's career, he performed more than 2,000 live performances including the Society for Ethical Culture in New York as part of the Lincoln Center Festival's Electronic Evolution Series in 2000. It was the first all-electronic ensemble performing Terry Riley's "In C". In 2003, he performed at The Montreal Jazz Festival as a solo Chapman Stick artist. More recently, Greg enjoyed performing with singer/songwriter Peyton Tochtermann playing not only their own compositions, but keeping alive the music of the late Paul Koors.

Greg was a member of the performance faculty at UVA. He worked with Emmett Chapman to donate a Stick to the university and created a small teaching studio for the Chapman Stick. He was an enormous presence in the music department advising and assisting people wherever he saw the need. Greg was constantly active in the local music scene as a leader of projects that he imagined and brought to fruition.

For ten years (1987- 1997), Greg taught songwriting in the UVA Young Writers Workshop. As so beautifully stated by Margo Figgins, Professor and Founding Director of the UVA YWW, "Those YWW songwriting alumni are a part of Greg's remarkable legacy of inspired, deeply knowledgeable teaching, a quality for which Greg was also known in the larger world of music."

Greg was exceptionally generous and caring. He loved to help others and create connections. He cared deeply about the environment and his community. He gave his time freely to lend assistance and would drop everything to help a friend or family

member. Within the Charlottesville community, he had volunteered for Literacy Volunteers and the Charlottesville Free Clinic.

Greg's sanctuary was his home and family. He was a very devoted husband, father, son and brother. He enjoyed many happy hours tending to his vegetable garden, riding his tractor, relishing the rich natural surroundings of his home, and communing with the family goats, dogs, and horses. He was so proud to be a father and spent many hours with his children exploring, teaching them music and art, attending sports and band events, and supporting their schools.

Left to cherish his memory are his wife, Joyce, daughters, Sharon and Merri, brother Jeff and his wife Cheryl, sister Karen Sasaki and her husband Rick, sister Laurie Felton and her husband Tom, nieces Erin and Casey Howard, nephews Max and Jack Sasaki, aunt Sara "Sally" Mastreani, numerous treasured cousins, and his many dear friends, students, and fans.

Greg had a very large extended family and was predeceased by his parents Everette and Beverly Howard, and his beloved friend and mentor, Emmett Chapman.

Greg possessed an enormous amount of hope and optimism for a better world and believed his music and love would contribute towards building a kinder society. He woke up each day with joy in his heart. He started each morning with coffee in his hand, entered his studio, and played beautiful music.

A service for Greg will be held on Saturday, July 22, 2023 at 2:00 pm, Teague Funeral Home, 2260 Ivy Rd, Charlottesville, Virginia 22903.

A Celebration of Life at his home will follow. Brightly colored attire requested and please bring your favorite story about Greg to share at his celebration.

In lieu of flowers, please consider making a donation to the UVA Young Writers Workshop: Young Writers General Scholarship Fund, in memory of Greg Howard.