

Tischler continues to play, promote music scene

By JOHN ALVAREZ
Special to the Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Any musician knows the best song has to have something that the listener can relate to, be it a measured beat or a lyrical hook. But more importantly, what makes a song a classic is the images it creates as a person listens to it.

The same can be said about a person. Some folks are known in a few public circles. But when almost everyone in town knows a little bit about a person, they are someone other people will sing ballads about. Cape May has such a person, and his name is Barry Tischler.

He has been singing and playing guitar since he started college. Growing up in Pittsburgh, he had a country music band that played for about five years around the city. When he moved here in 1980, he hadn't played professionally for a few years. But it didn't mean he had stopped singing the songs he liked.

"I brought my guitar to a party and started singing," Tischler recalled. "Then the next party came along, and I was invited and so was my guitar. It was friends and other locals who lived in Cape May at that time. They wanted to hear me sing, so I started playing at parties."

Tischler played the music he liked to hear, which ranged from country music to the classic folk singer style. On any given night, Tischler would mix it up with several genres from Jimmy Buffet and James Taylor while throwing in a little Frank Sinatra to mix it up.

However, Tischler kept his singing to parties mostly. He owned stores such as Kaleidoscope and Just For Laughs, which took up a lot of his time. Yet he started playing professionally again eight years ago. The manager of the Marlin Tuna Club in Cape May, Norman Hoffman, was a friend of Tischler's who knew he could play.

"He asked me why don't I come down one day and sing," Tischler said. "I was a little afraid to do it since I hadn't sung professionally since I first moved down here, which was about 30 years ago. But Norman

encouraged me, so I went down and sang."

As Tischler recalled, it was a Sunday night and there were only five couples at the Marlin Tuna Club the first time he was there. But when he started playing, the couples started dancing. As he was packing up his gear after playing for a few hours, everyone told Tischler he had to do it again.

"I didn't get paid. I did it for a meal and a few drinks. But I ended up playing there for two years," he said with a laugh.

Soon after some of the bartenders in town heard him play, word about just how good Tischler was started to spread to many of the locals, including Frank and Deirdre Hinelene, owners of The Pilot House, a former restaurant located on Decatur Street.

Tischler knew the crowds at The Pilot House were more into the sing-along style of entertainment. So, as any good balladeer would do, he sang more of the Irish

folk and country western songs to win the crowd over. The Hinelenes were so impressed that they offered Tischler a steady paying gig every Sunday, which he has held even after The Pilot House was sold and is now a restaurant called FiNS. "They (FiNS) have already hired me this summer, which will be my eighth year of playing in this location," Tischler said. "I'm grateful to them for keeping me on."

Along with his weekly performances at FiNS, Tischler also finds time to perform an Irish Happy Hour once a month at The Mad Batter restaurant, located on Jackson Street, with his band Whiskey in the Jar. Along with Tischler, the band also features violinist Tom Naglee Jr. as well as vocal harmonist and wife Susan Tischler.

"I am truly impressed with how the restaurants in Cape May like FiNS and the Mad Batter have reached out to support local singers and musicians all year round," Tischler said. "Not

just in the summer, which would be normal in a shore town. Now you can walk in these places and see talented local performers almost every night throughout the year."

He also helps out local musicians through a series of open-mic nights that he has been the host of for several years. The open-mic nights first started at The Pilot House seven years ago, and according to Tischler, only one person showed up. Since then, Gordon Vincent, J.M. Kerns and Debra Donahue, Jim Ross, Roy Baker and more seasoned professionals who were and still are living in the area began showing up and participating. Most recently, the open mic has moved to Elaine's on Lafayette Street.

"I was just telling the owner, Shirley Phinney, how great it is to do it here because we perform on the stage where they do their dinner theater. With the lights and sound system, any new musician can truly get the feeling of an authen-

tic theatrical performance. Which makes everyone feel important," he said.

Theater seemed to be the next logical step for this local balladeer. One day about five years ago, Tischler was talking with Gayle Stahlhuth, artistic director of the East Lynne Theater Company in Cape May, and asked if the theater would be interested in doing a Cape May version of the Grand Ole Opry. She jumped at the chance. So Tischler and several of his talented friends put together Cape May's Grand Ole Opry as a fundraiser for the theater.

"Gayle knew the success of the open mic because she and her theater company would attend after their performance," Tischler said. "We put it together and we sold 160 tickets to raise money for East Lynne. Now we do the opry on the Sunday before Thanksgiving at West Cape May Borough

Hall as a fundraiser for the West Cape May Christmas Parade. It's a lot of fun. And Susan (Tischler) plays Minnie Pearl, so that's probably why we sell out every year."

But the opry won't be until November. He said he is looking forward to the many gigs he has lined up for the summer season.

"It is so nice to see local places like the Mad Batter, FiNS and Elaine's really supporting local musicians like me. I don't see it ending any time soon, which is good for me, so long as my voice holds up," he said with a laugh. And, so long as his voice keeps on singing, the ballad of Barry will continue.

Tischler has released his second CD called "Time Slips Away" with the help of Vincent and many other musicians he wanted to acknowledge. To see any upcoming engagement, visit Tischler's Facebook page Whiskey in the JAR".



John Alvarez/Special to the STAR AND WAVE

Barry Tischler and his wife, Susan, enjoy performing at local clubs. Tischler has been singing and playing guitar since he was in college. 'I brought my guitar to a party and started singing. Then the next party came along, and I was invited and so was my guitar,' he said.

Cape May Forum celebrates freedom with two events

CAPE MAY — On Saturday, May 14, ChaseArts will present a reading of Obie Award-winning playwright Ain Gordon's play "If She Stood."

The play is set in a 19th-century Quaker meeting, the birthplace of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, where the audience will catch a glimpse into the mind of four female reformers who dedicated their lives to the abolition of slavery and the fight for women's rights: Sarah Mapps Douglass, Sarah Grimke, Angelina Weld Grimke and Sarah Pugh.

Significantly relevant to conversations many are having today about equality in society, their story turns on that crucial moment in which the women decide to raise their voices against social injustice.

The reading will be held at 11 a.m. at Macedonia Baptist Church, 630 Lafayette St. in Cape May. Admission is free and open to the public.

Prior to the reading, the Center for Community Arts will offer a guided Underground Railroad Tour at

9:30 a.m. Transportation will be provided to the reading. For more information and tickets for the trolley tour, visit centerforcommunityarts.org.

In addition, Cape May Forum will present "Dinner and a Show," featuring a three-course Southern-inspired dinner created by chef Josh Day on Wednesday, May 18, at the Island Grill, followed by East Lynne Theater Company's presentation of "Mr. Lincoln" at 8 p.m.

Tom Byrn's tour de force performance begins with a bang when former President Abraham Lincoln is assassinated. Through the remainder of the performance, key moments of the president's life flash before his eyes. The evening will culminate with a lively discussion hosted by East

Lynne Theater Company Artistic Director Gayle Stahlhuth and Byrn.

"Dinner and a Show" will begin at 6 p.m. with dinner at the Island Grill, 311 Mansion St. in Cape May. "Mr. Lincoln" will be staged at the First Presbyterian Church of Cape May, 500 Hughes St. Tickets are available for \$60 per person at capemayforum.org.

Cape May Forum's theme for 2016 is "With Liberty and Justice for All," and explores issues surrounding social justice in America. Its series of educational programming commences in April and runs through the fall. Each of its programs will be presented in partnership with one of Cape May's best-known cultural organizations.

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