

stanharrison

Legendary saxophone player comes to town with They Might Be Giants

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CIN WEEKLY CONTRIBUTOR

Stan Harrison's name may not be a household word. He's a musician with a long and successful career, but few people know when they're listening to his work. One thing is certain, though – many people, every day, hear Harrison's accomplished saxophone work, whether they're listening to a David Bowie album or just watching Disney Channel with their kids.

BEGINNINGS

"I really loved the sound of the instrument. And an uncle of mine had one he lent me," says Harrison of his earliest experience with the saxophone. "I wanted to be in the jazz band in school and had been taking guitar lessons. But as soon as I started to listen – the first saxophone player I listened to was Cannonball Adderley, and soon after that it was John Coltrane ... the sounds of these players, they kind of blew me away. At that point I knew that this was really what I wanted to be playing."

The choice proved to be a wise one, as a handful of opportunities quickly blossomed into a career.

"Someone I knew who played around college where I went to school was called to play with Southside Johnny and the Asbury Jukes, couldn't do the gig, called me up, and I auditioned and made it – and that's how everything started," he says. "I went from there to Little Steven, then David Bowie, Serge Gainsbourg, Duran Duran – a lot of people in between."

"It always starts out, it seems like, with someone you know," he adds, "Because a lot of these people, they don't put want ads in the paper."

TMBG

When Harrison rolls into town this week, he'll be performing with They Might Be Giants, a band with whom he's developed an ongoing working relationship.

"I've been recording off and on with them for seven years or so,"



PHOTO COURTESY OF STAN HARRISON

Saxophonist Stan Harrison will be performing with They Might Be Giants Nov. 6 at The Southgate House.

he says of the two Johns in They Might Be Giants – John Linnell and John Flansburgh. "I love working with them, in a nutshell. I think they're very talented singers/songwriters. So on a musical level it's a pleasure, and they're great guys. They hire people who you enjoy being with. So it's all upside stuff."

Harrison's sax work can be heard on many of the band's recordings, from full albums to children's records to television work, the latter of which has kept the band busy in recent years. (Of note to adults: He's done music heard on *The Daily Show*. Of note to children: He makes the sounds that make the cartoons dance on *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse*.)

He's also a regular member of They Might Be Giants' touring band, an opportunity that Harrison greatly enjoys.

"I've never played a show with them where the audience has not been extremely enthused in their response," he says. "I think it's a very good show. It's honest. The excitement and laughter and all that you see onstage is an honest representation of what's going on. There's nothing phony being portrayed onstage."

"THE OPTIMIST"

As a successful studio and touring musician, Harrison could easily sit back and enjoy a career of adding to other people's musical creations. But what drives Harrison to play iconic parts in songs by the likes of David Bowie and Radiohead also drives him to write and record his own songs. The result is the new album, *The Optimist*, a collection of eclectic tunes – some instrumental, some with vocals – that display a very full musical range.

"I've always had a desire to write," he says. "I can imagine other people have the same impulse. It's hard to explain the urge to put something down on paper, to make something up. But the urge to be creative is fairly strong, so I've always felt connected to the thought of writing, and I've been writing for quite a long time."

"It was music that was written very honestly," he adds. "That must seem like a cliché, but it's something that's very important to me, that it came directly from the heart. The intention was to convey some sense of honesty. I hope that it comes across that way."

JUST THE FACTS

WHAT: They Might Be Giants with Oppenheimer

WHEN: 8 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 6

WHERE: The Southgate House, 24 E. Third St., Newport

PRICE: \$22-\$25

PARKING: Nearby lots and Levee Garage (\$3-\$5)

CONTACT: 859-431-2201 or www.southgatehouse.com

ETC: Stan Harrison's new album, *The Optimist*, can be purchased at cdbaby.com and Amazon.com and on iTunes.



PLAYING AROUND

Saxophonist Stan Harrison cites John Coltrane as an inspiration, but his own sax work can be heard on many influential rock recordings of recent decades. Here are just a few of the albums that Harrison has played on:

RADIOHEAD: *Kid A*

DAVID BOWIE: A number of albums, from *Let's Dance* to *Heathen*

THEY MIGHT BE GIANTS: A number of albums, including the group's most recent album, *The Else*

DURAN DURAN: A number of albums, from *Notorious* to *Liberty*

MICK JAGGER: *The Very Best of Mick Jagger*

TALKING HEADS: *Naked*