

Robert G. Doyle

July 3, 1932 - November 24, 2014

From humble beginnings amidst the depression era and the war rationed 40's, Bobby Doyle began playing the piano as a 10-year-old youngster growing up in New Westminster, B.C. He was introduced to the rudiments with sporadic lessons from an elderly teacher who lived in the neighborhood, but he wasn't too keen on classical piano. Being interested in popular music, he spent hours practicing on his own during his teenage years while friends played outside, or as he put it, "doing something girls mostly did". Immersing himself in music, he soon began working locally, "plunking away in cowboy bands" at age 15. At age 16 he made his radio debut on CKNW with Mike, Mark & Jack, The Rhythm Pals, appearing on the popular Bill Rea show. These early experiences spawned a 60 plus year career as a prominent Vancouver musician and private teacher.



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In the 50's he moved to Vancouver and began working at The Flame and The Vancouver Lawn & Tennis Club. Throughout the 60's and into the 70's he was a house band member in three of Vancouver's most prominent supper clubs starting at Izzy's, often at The Cave and ending at Oil Can Harry's. This coincided with a musical association lasting over 40 years alongside Vancouver's iconic Bobby Hales. These clubs played host to myriad well-known entertainers and music performers. It was a fruitful era for live music in the city and the opportunity to play alongside and/or accompany the stars of the day, including Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, Stan Getz, Buddy Rich, Mitzi Gaynor, Robert Goulet, Sherry Lewis, Jack Carter, Red Buttons, a young up and coming Stevie Wonder, Chubby Checker and countless more. In the late 70's he was the pianist for The Alan Hamel Show on BCTV providing musical ambience and accompanying various invited music guests. Among his favorites was the outstanding Rita Moreno from West Side Story fame. As he put it, she was "a real pro". Other personal highlights included performances with Frank Sinatra at the PNE in '78 and a few years later with the stellar Shirley MacLaine at the Queen Elizabeth Theater.

His passion for teaching began at a young age, too. After taking some lessons to learn more about chord voicings from Carl Hodson, a sax player who ran a music studio in New West, he quickly assumed the piano teaching practice simply by being a more accomplished player. He developed a successful instructional approach to learning chords suitable for any type of aspiring pianist. It was a routine that took you through the basics and worked well for any level of player. It "filled in the holes" for even those who already sounded accomplished. Shortly thereafter, albeit briefly, he took over the reins of Rex's Music from the talented Wilf Wiley in downtown Vancouver. He also spent years going house-to-house teaching upwards of 60 lessons a week and working casuals before settling into a home studio in North Vancouver and teaching there from 1965 till 1992. He was the principal private instructor for non-classical piano majors attending Capilano College during the 70's and 80's and as well, for a short period of time, would fly once a week over to Vancouver Island and give lessons at the former Malaspina College. However, he wasn't too fond of taking a seaplane to work.

Growing up in this environment, I was privy to countless sessions and a never-ending stream of students. Throughout the years there were an innumerable "who's who" coming to the house. My dad wasn't big on name dropping or boasting, but in retrospect I believe he deserves to be lauded for his association to, among others and in no particular order, Bob Hales & all the players associated with him, Eve Smith, Eleanor Collins, Pat Hervey, Don Thompson, Renee Rosnes, Diana Krall, Phil Dwyer, Doug Johnson (Loverboy), and Darcy Argue (Secret Society). Whether it was a lesson, a session or just a hang, there was something to be learned and put into practice.

As a musician my father was a great band mate. I had the privilege to start my professional career working jobs with him. He knew a million tunes, could play them in any key, give you

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an intro and accompany you tirelessly. He was always engaged and listening to what was going on, never distracted and, above all, uncompetitive. He was a consummate musician. Essentially, he was a self-taught player who believed in applying oneself to keep working on things and taking it one step at a time. It's exactly how he succeeded and he was supportive of anyone interested in learning. When it came to teaching someone how to read chords and what to do with them, he taught, without exception, every type of personality you could imagine. As for himself, he was still eager to learn well into his seventies. While visiting with me in Montreal he asked me to set up a "lesson" with a young jazz player so he could "pick their brain" and find out what was trending in the piano world. He loved music and even more the piano. When I was six he sat me down one day and asked if I'd be interested in playing an instrument. I said, "I'd love to play the drums" After a brief pause, he replied, "Why don't we start you out on piano first and see how that goes?"

—Aron Doyle