

Remembering Red

The Red Kelly Collection @ the Tacoma Public Library

Red. For decades, he played in bands fronted by the likes of Claude Thornhill, Red Norvo, the legendary Woody Herman and his Herd, Stan Kenton, the great Harry James, Buddy Rich, Doc Severinsen, Billie Holiday, Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley and Billy Eckstine. He jammed with Charlie “Yardbird” Parker in New York City, *“Parker came up and kissed me after we played together... I cried.... He was a legend.”*

Red. He spent three years with Woody Herman. “I went with Woody to Europe and realized that our one glaring contribution to the arts had respect in every other country but our own.” Red adored Woody and they were good friends. Herman dedicated *‘Blues for Red,’* to Red on his *Concord 50th Anniversary Album* saying of the bassist, *“He’s done some weird things in his life... which puts him very close to me.”* Red liked that.

Red. He played with the great Harry James. “To play bass with a big band was my meat. It was first class all the way...the easiest big band job in the world. We would do a month in Vegas, then Reno, then on the road touring, then start over. The band took in three million a year. Harry was the best musician I ever saw. Funny thing... when I would come back to Seattle my folks would always say *‘When are you going to get a real job?’* until I joined Harry James and they saw him in the movies. Then I was all right.”

Red. He campaigned to be Washington State’s governor on his own OWL Party ticket (the acronym alternately stood for “Out With Logic” and “On With Lunacy”). Promising to “heal the Continental Divide” and observing “unemployment isn’t working,” he garnered 8% of the overall vote. In 1989, he again ran for office - this time for the Mayor of Tacoma. *‘If Kelly were King,’* read a *News Tribune* profile, *“Tacoma would have an amusement park, a paddle-wheeler with gambling, a farmers’ market and cable cars clanging through downtown streets.”* Kelly came in fourth that year, receiving 10% of the vote.

Red. He and his wife Donna opened a club, the *Tumwater Conservatory of Music* in Olympia. Four years later, he opened *Kelly’s* in Tacoma. “I have fun with it. I have no delusions. I’m as good on the bass as some and better than other players. I play with people I love and respect. My wife spoils me. I have great kids. I am surrounded by wonderful friends.”

Red. He made music, terrific music... he kept jazz alive in Tacoma....and he made us laugh.

<http://www.redkelly.org>

Get involved!

The Man. The Music. The Politics. The Celebrities

Your donation will help us to collect, preserve, and provide access to the extraordinary photographs, and stories of jazzman Red Kelly and ‘America’s music.’

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Make checks payable to: **TPL Foundation Kelly Fund**. Your donation is tax-deductible.

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____ Yes, please contact me about volunteering to assist with the Red Kelly Collection.

Mail to: Tacoma Public Library Foundation
1102 Tacoma Avenue South
Tacoma, WA 98402 (253) 591-5613
KellyProject@tpl.lib.wa.us



Top to bottom:
Red with the Claude Thornhill band (c. 1952)
Red & the Harry James Band with Buddy Rich on drums
Red & the great Harry James
Red with unidentified band

“ What do I remember most? The two Carnegie Hall concerts with Woody and Harry; the first shot with Chubby Jackson when I was 20; those magic moments that happen once a year as a player when the entire group grooves and plays as one. For a high school drop out, I'm lucky!”

Red Kelly



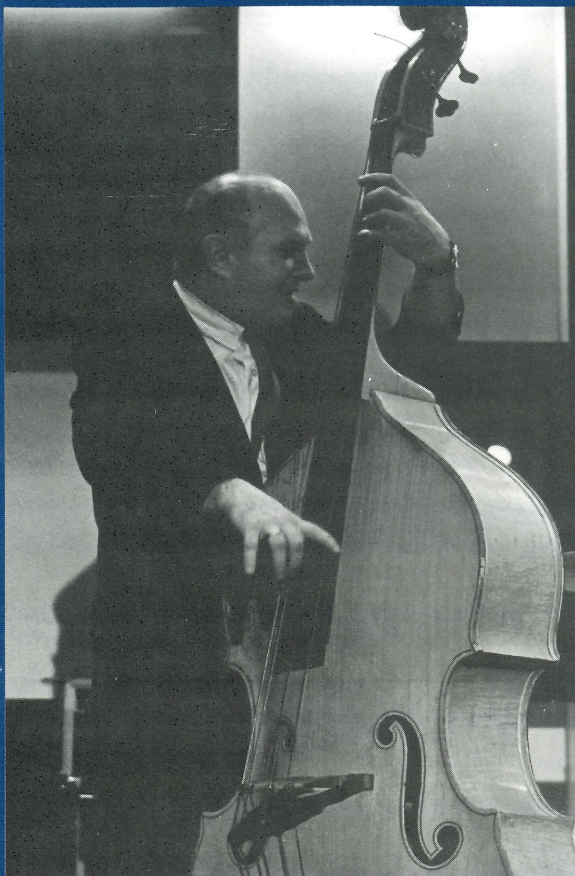
Top to bottom:
Washington Gover nor John Spellman, Red Kelly
and basketball superstar Bill Russell

Red & his band at the reopenng of Union Station (1992)

Tacoma Public Library

“ You don't choose music, it chooses you. I know lots of people that choose music that are nuts about it, but it hasn't chosen them. I didn't care what I played when I started. I just wanted to play music. I didn't care 'cause I didn't have to get up early and I got to wear nice clothes.”

Red Kelly



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<http://www.redkelly.org>

About the project

Acquiring the *Red Kelly Collection* was the first step in creating a valuable archive for writers, researchers, historians and our community.

Here's what happens next:

- Preserve and document the images, recordings and other material in the collection;
- Expand the archive through oral histories, additional photographs, recordings and related memorabilia;
- Create a website that tells Red's story. This website will feature a searchable database of all the photographs and other material in the collection. A promotional version of this website can be previewed at www.redkelly.org.
- Design and create a major exhibit that uses Red's story to provide an overview of 'America's music' in the post-war years. The exhibit would be shown locally and regionally. This is a long-term goal of the project.



Red with members of Norm Hoagy's Band
at Seattle's Showbox Theater (c. 1951)

The Red Kelly Collection

is a special collection of the Tacoma Public Library. Established in 2003, the collection documents the career of jazz bassist, sometime politician and jazz club owner Thomas 'Red' Kelly, and collects and preserves materials related to his life and music.

Red Kelly's story is part of a much bigger story — the history of American music in the post-World War II years. In recounting his story, the Library will also tell the story of the countless musicians who found themselves playing 'America's music' in clubs in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Las Vegas and other cities across the United States and Europe. This portrait eloquently captures a time in our nation's past when Big Band music dominated the airwaves and concert halls. In the 1950s when the raging popularity and sheer number of Big Bands declined, these musicians changed with the times. Their music reflected the influences of bebop, cool jazz, pop and rock styles. They, like Red, found ways to keep the sounds of the Big Bands alive.

The original material for the collection came from Tacoma jazzman Thomas 'Red' Kelly and includes photographs, correspondence, news clippings, scrapbooks, artwork, sound recordings, and ephemera.

This material is being augmented through the collection of oral histories with Kelly's contemporaries and through the addition of photographs, music and ephemera from musicians who played with Kelly throughout his career.