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# musicforum



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# THE STORY OF ART AND MUSIC

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The story of Art & Music is a love story. It is a story of how a young boy was taught by his father and grandfather to love music and to play the guitar. And how fifty years later, the successful composer and musician records an album featuring the music of his childhood as a tribute to his father, grandfather and his Italian heritage.



Art Phillips





## A Family Tradition

For MCA Councillor, former President of the Australian Guild of Screen Composers and internationally awarded screen composer, Art Phillips, music was a family affair.

Throughout Art's childhood most evenings were spent in his grandpa's kitchen, and from the age of seven Art and his father, Arthur Mario Phillips, were on guitar and his grandfather, Antonio Di Filippo, on mandolin as they all played music together.

Di Filippo is the family name, changed at the moment of immigration on Ellis Island, New York in 1901 when Antonio was only 7 years old. He had no choice in the matter as US officials insisted he take on this new frontier with an appropriate surname.

His father, also a professional musician, had a duo called The Strolling Venetians, who performed in the Great Lakes region of the USA for over fifty years. The duo would play at Italian restaurants strolling from table to table entertaining the patrons. Art would occasionally fill in as a teenager and it was here that he learnt at the coalface about musical endurance and performance techniques - skills that proved essential in Art's forty years as a professional musician and composer.

Young Art's role model and inspiration was Tony Mottola, also of Italian descent, and one of the most respected and sought after studio musicians in the American music and recording industry.

Mottola performed with the likes of Billie Holliday, Burl Ives, Perry Como, Count Basie and Rosemary Clooney. He was Frank Sinatra's musician of choice and toured with Sinatra for eight years, including a month-long season at Carnegie Hall (breaking records with sell-out shows), the White House, and at the Royal Albert Hall for the Queen of England. Mottola also scored the music to the very early US drama television series, *Danger*, for directors Yul Brynner and Sidney Lumet. All the episodes were performed with the sound of just a single guitar.

'It was just after listening to Tony Mottola play *Anema e Core* that I decided to become a professional musician. I was only 11 years old. I was fascinated by his style and great technique,' Art said recently. 'And when I finally met Tony in New York whilst I was working with Barry Manilow...well...it was a highlight in my life.'

## Breaking into the Industry

Passion, determination and being true to a dream created the opportunity for young Art to break into the highly competitive US music industry.

His older sister and her husband took Art, then thirteen, to see The Lettermen group perform in his hometown of Erie, Pennsylvania. A household name in the States, The Lettermen are an American male pop music vocal trio who had sixteen Top 10 singles, 11 gold records, and five Grammy nominations. Their original hits include *When I Fall in Love* (Nat King Cole later did a cover version), *Theme from A Summer Place* and *Put Your Head on My Shoulder*.

After the show the young schoolboy hung out at the stage door, met the Musical Director, Vince Morton, and told him his desire to be a professional musician. Vince was encouraging to the youngster and gave him his business card.

Fast forward to five years later.

After graduation, Art was accepted into both the Juilliard School of Music (New York) and the Berklee College of Music in Boston. He had a clearly defined path in store to study at Berklee (to date, graduates of Berklee have received 221 Grammy awards) then following Berklee he had plans to move to New York City to pursue his career as guitarist.

At dinner one night his sister asked the big picture question: 'So what do you really want to do?' Art responded that his dream was to work with the big acts as their guitarist.

Art's sister, Charlotte, suggested he call Vince Morton then and there. (Art had carried his now battered business card in his wallet.) On the other side of the country in LA the phone rang and Vince advised the young Art they had just the previous week hired a new guitarist. However, he was welcome to audition for any future openings if he was in Los Angeles.

Although only eighteen, Art recognised this for what it was - a rare opportunity. So he booked a flight to LA the next week - guitar in hand - and auditioned with Vince on the piano.

Art felt at the time that it was a terrible audition, but looking back it must have been good enough as five months later the road manager for The Lettermen phoned Art to say they were in Pittsburg (two and a half hours drive from Art's home town), their guitarist had just quit and that 'Vince tells us you are the man for the job'.

And so a young man got his big break.

Art spent two and half years playing with The Lettermen touring the USA and internationally, and making the connections that would later prove critical to moving into screen composition.

During one of his first tours with The Lettermen, Art found himself back in his hometown - performing at the same theatre where five years earlier as an eager high school boy hanging out at the stage door, he originally saw The Lettermen. Art remembered their performance that night. 'Mom and Dad were so proud of this moment. We had The Lettermen over to our house following the concert and Mom made the world's best lasagne.'

Looking back on his time with the Lettermen, Art reflects that 'It was a wonderful two and a half years working with them. Then I decided, as my connections grew larger due to recording work with The Lettermen at Capitol Records in LA, to leave the group and pursue a career in Los Angeles.'

## The LA Years

LA offered the opportunity to seek and fulfil the dream of becoming a session guitarist, and to follow his role model, Tony Mottola, and work with the big acts.

Art worked in LA for fourteen years from 1974 to 1988. He became the guitarist of choice to many big names, and along the way he picked up two Emmy Awards, toured internationally, co-wrote her final Top Ten single with soul/R&B artist Minnie Riperton, and was even a guest at Hugh Hefner's Playboy Mansion (he even swam in Hef's pool twice).

Starting out, Art worked as the house guitarist at the Playboy Club. Back then the Club was famous for modern jazz and R&B artists - one of the few places this type of music could be heard. It had world-class performers, a strict dress code and guests included the rich and famous.

Art went on to work with The Carpenters on specials for NBC TV, tour Great Britain as guitarist for the singer and songwriter Dory Previn (ex wife of Andre Previn), and tour internationally as Musical Director, orchestrator and guitarist for Demis Roussos, which is how Art first came to Australia.

Art performed with the late Minnie Riperton and they co-wrote that Top Ten single in 1978. His touring with Riperton included their performances as opening act for George Benson. (Minnie Riperton's daughter is Maya Rudolph, star of last year's smash film *Bridesmaids* which took just under \$300 million at the box office.)

Working as a session guitarist opened up the screen industry to Art. He played on-screen on *The Love Boat* television series as one of the band members (he can be seen in current episodes screening on Australian TV playing a Gibson ES-355 red guitar and sporting an afro) and during this time he lunched most days with the Angels from *Charlie's Angels* at the next table, as they filmed directly next door to the *Love Boat* set at Fox Studios.

He also toured internationally with Barry Manilow for three years and co-wrote with Manilow, *Here's To Us* which was performed live at the renowned Blenheim Palace concert in 1983, acknowledged as being a landmark concert in Britain. There was an audience of over 50,000 and guests included Princess Diana, Sarah, Duchess of York and Boy George.

As a session guitarist Art played for many screen composers and his next big break came when he was invited by the composer for *General Hospital* to co-compose the music for a new TV series, *Santa Barbara* in 1984. The series continued until 1993, aired in over 40 countries worldwide and brought Art two Emmys, for *Outstanding Music Direction* and *Composition in a Drama Series*.

Art first came to Australia as Musical Director and band member for Demis Roussos (who has sold over 40 million albums worldwide). He then returned a year later as record producer and Musical Director for John Rowles, then again a year thereafter with Barry Manilow. He fell in love with the Australian lifestyle and decided this was where he would wish to settle and bring up his kids in a few years time.

In Australia, he remained in the music scene before moving over



"MY FATHER ALWAYS WANTED ME TO RELEASE AN ALBUM THAT FEATURED THE TRADITIONAL ITALIAN COMPOSITIONS THAT MY FATHER, GRANDFATHER AND I WOULD PLAY TOGETHER."



Art Phillips' Grandpa and Dad

to screen composing. He was Musical Director for the late Ricky May as well as continuing his duties as Music Director for John Rowles. Art also produced the record album *Another Chapter* (EMI) for Rowles that went Gold. Since coming to Australia, Art has worked as a screen composer, is an in-demand lecturer, and composed production music for world renowned music libraries with over 56 CD releases and over 700 composition titles.

## A Return to His Roots

An issue that faces many screen composers is that they are guns for hire. They write wonderful music but it is for someone else – for a film, documentary or television series.

Creative opportunities are changing as composers have their own studio, reduced production costs and the ability to market direct via the web, which is enabling them to work on projects of passion. And for Art, the opportunity to be creative on his own project was something he seized last year.

'My father always wanted me to release an album that featured the traditional Italian compositions that my father, grandfather and I would play together,' Art explains.

Fifty years after he first played music as a seven year old with his father and grandfather, Art has produced and released the deeply

personal album, *Chitarre Acustiche d'Italia* (Acoustic Guitars of Italy). It honours his father and grandfather whose Italian origin is the root for Art's musical inspiration, and is a tribute to the power of music in connecting cultures.

The album features the music of traditional Italy that these Di Filippo men of three generations played together; many of the songs feature the arrangements of his father and grandfather. The final song on the album, *Funiculi Funicula*, was written in 1880 and was played by Art's father and grandfather as tribute to Art's great grandfather, Nunzio Cacchione from Naples, as it was his favourite song.

On the album Art plays his father's 1941 Gibson L-12, a 1947 L-12 and his grandfather's Gibson A-50 mandolin (circa 1950). The album cover is a photo of Art and his father playing guitars together in his grandfather's backyard in the summer of 1982. 'My father never had an album of his own so I think he would have been really happy with that choice,' said Art.

The tracks include well-known traditional Italian compositions, such as *Santa Lucia* and *O Sole Mio*, that were played by Art's father and grandfather, the film music of Nino Rota (*Love Theme from The Godfather*), and one original composition by Art, *Grandpa's Kitchen*, that evokes the memories of the time. On the origins of the song, Art says 'We

played every night together and the epicentre of our music was the kitchen of my grandfather, grandpa's kitchen. We played the Italian folk songs and some classics of the Forties.'

Listening to the album makes you want to cook up a large pot of spaghetti bolognese, open a bottle of chianti and invite family and friends around to enjoy a meal, music, conversation and laughter.

110 years after his grandfather migrated to the USA, Art travelled back to the family's home town of Montenero Val Cocchiara (Molise) in Italy last year, met his family and learnt more about his cultural heritage. Art has also been studying the Italian language now for just over a year and a half.

For Art, his creative life has now come full circle, and he is committed to bringing his heritage culture to the next part of his career plans. He was recently invited to perform at Brisbane's Italian Week Cultural Festival, and he played the traditional Italian songs he learnt from his father and grandfather all those years ago.

While his father and grandfather taught Art to love music, now it is Art's love for his father and grandfather that influences the music Art chooses to play today.

Jo Smith is Executive Director of the Australian Guild of Screen Composers.

*Chitarre Acustiche d'Italia* and the stories behind each song can be found at

[www.artphillips.com/italia](http://www.artphillips.com/italia)