

# Harrison Goldberg:

## A Lifetime of Pursuing Art Culminates in the Release of *Once Upon a Tune*

By Tempra Board

**H**arrison Goldberg is truly a wonder. A “triple threat”—he is a musician first and foremost, but also a poet and a painter—and he pursues each of these crafts with authenticity, potency, verve, and skill. Maybe this is what comes of living true to your passions, doing what you love, day in and day out, for decades. And maybe he has no choice. As with many of the greats in any artistic endeavor, what we learn from their voice, their story, and their art, is that they are *compelled*. Compelled to follow their desires and practice until they can’t do it anymore. Compelled even if the beginning seems so hard and hopeless. Compelled even if it never works out. Doesn’t matter. And that’s how virtuosos are made. Vision. Woodshedding. Belief in spite of all.

Harrison grew up in New Bedford, Massachusetts, and after sneaking into an integrated jazz club as a teenager in the early ‘60s, and hearing Joe Thomas playing Walter Gross’ “Tenderly” on the tenor saxophone, he instantly knew, “That’s for me. I gotta play that horn!” While attending the Berklee College of Music in Boston, Harrison met Jimmy Kingsby. Both of them were in their early 30s, attending school on the GI Bill after serving in the military, and bonding over being a little bit older and in love with the jazz saxophone. They became life-long friends.

Jimmy was the inspiration for the character, and narrator, Forest Tune in Harrison’s just-released book, *Once Upon a Tune: One Young Man’s Quest to Become a Jazz Saxophonist*. *Once Upon a Tune*



**Saxopolis**

is a young adult fictional story about two teenagers, one white, and one Black, who hope to follow their collective dream to become jazz musicians, against their families’ wishes. There is, of course, an autobiographical element, and the story takes us on a sometimes-painful, yet ultimately rewarding journey filled with magic, emotion, and wisdom.

**HarrisonGoldbergArts.  
com**

I came to know Harrison first as a visual artist. My friend and fellow artist Ruth Downes, who had been listening to him play his saxophone at various venues along the coast in Sonoma and Mendocino counties—where Harrison has lived for the past two decades—told me about his art, and that I should think about a profile for *Mark Makers*'.

I was instantly smitten with Harrison's paintings and drawings, and their distinctive style that takes its cues from jazz's improvisation and tempo. Mostly created on 5" x 7" cards that Harrison says "can be easily stored in archival notebooks," his works are in ink, watercolor, brush pens, acrylic, and oil pastels. They are abstract jumbles of energy, though sometimes conveying an image underneath, often of jazz musicians exuberantly jamming. Harrison's loose, ecstatic style is ripe, playful, and fun. And his works keep you looking.

After many years teaching music and working in communications, and always playing his saxophone, Harrison, now 79, currently isn't able to play his sax due to advancing arthritis. But that won't stop him. An excellent writer, poet, and entertainer, he's been reinventing himself through spoken word performances (jazz poetry, what else?). My friend and fellow Harrison fan Jamie White—always quick with a witty epithet—quipped, "He's the Indomitable Sax Man!" But perhaps not playing music allowed Harrison time



to get his book, several years in the making, to the finish line.

Writing such a book takes courage. Harrison is a white man in an historically Black world, writing about a musical genre forged in the horrendous story of slavery in America, but which transcended these origins to reach all of us, no matter our color or background. The reason Harrison can write this book is that he does so with authenticity and authority. He has lived the dream described in the book—a white boy to whom jazz music called—and he answered. He learned, he practiced, he was humbled, he paid homage, and he dedicated his life to it.

The wisdom Harrison has gained from this lifetime pursuit issues forth in *Once Upon a Tune*



## Cirque

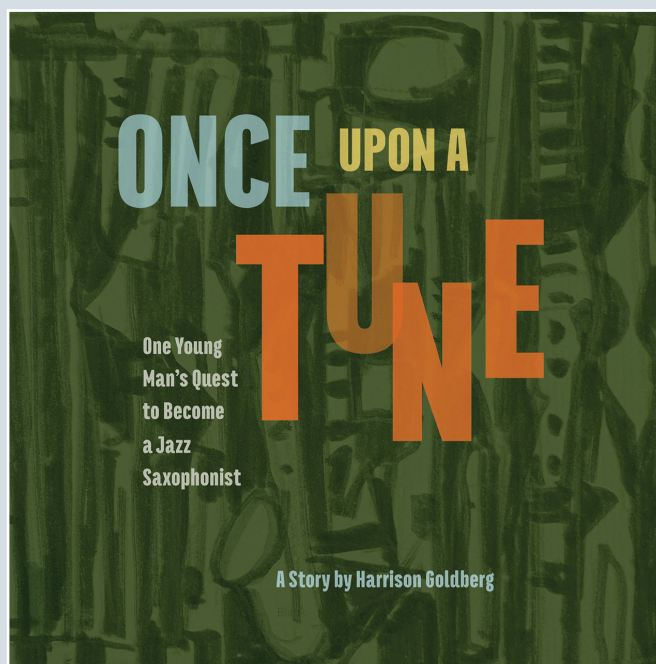
As with many of Harrison's creative pursuits, and like jazz itself, the book is a blending. Harrison's jazz-themed original artwork accompanies each chapter. When I sat down to chat with Harrison, he explained that the medications he takes keep him up at night. While this sounds excruciating, he shrugged it off. He wasn't even complaining. Harrison's spirit will not give in; this new reality just gives him more time to create. And so he paints every night. As he shared during a show of his artwork at the Think Visual Gallery in Point Arena a few years ago, "With the ever-changing tools of my craft ... I embark on a nocturnal journey established during a recurrent pattern of insomnia. While it has deprived me of badly needed sleep, it has serendipitously provided the gateway to the creation of many works of art."

I'm thrilled to share just a few of Harrison's artworks here, but to see more—and read an engaging story about coming of age, music, and finding one's voice—pick up a copy of *Once Upon a Tune*, available at Four-Eyed Frog Books, the Dolphin Gallery, and the Gualala Arts Center in Gualala, as well as The Sea Ranch Lodge General Store on The Sea Ranch. ■

through the voice of Dr. Saxx, an African-American tenor saxophone master and mentor, who helps to shape main character Stormy Keys' destiny.

"In the beginnin', that bird could hardly get off the ground. Ya see, the kid was havin' one helluva time tryin' ta get his chops. Still, he declared he was gonna stay wit' it, no matter how long it took. He jus' knew that the song inside the golden bird had ta be a beautiful one an' once he found it, he'd set that bird free. An' that's when folks would surely start listenin' ta 'im, maybe even begin ta fall in love wit' his sound."

-Forest Tune in *Once Upon a Tune*



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