

Yuri Bohdan Turchyn



Photo credit: Courtesy of George Wirt

Yuri Turchyn, renowned international jazz musician whose music crisscrossed cultures, dies from The Ukrainian Weekly Yuri Bohdan Turchyn, a world-class five-string Latin jazz violinist whose international flair crisscrossed cultures and blended Gypsy Jazz, Afro-Cuban, and Latin Beat into fusion symmetry and string swing, died on April 14. He was 73.

Mr. Turchyn, a singer and songwriter who composed and arranged original music, was known for his distinctive voice and smooth, melodic vocals. He evolved and expanded a career as a featured premier performing artist and was recognized and respected as a musician who lived and breathed his craft.

Mr. Turchyn was a founding member of Kinderhook, a band that marked the success of the nascent New Jersey music scene and became a symbol of the 1970s country-rock era. Their performances at The Stone Pony, Capitol Theater, and the Schaeffer Summer Music Festival were unparalleled, often famously highlighting his 1976 rendition of Jean Luc Ponty's New Country and fiery OBS (Orange Blossom Special).

Born on June 16, 1950, in Trenton, NJ, Mr. Turchyn's musical journey began at age 6 when he started playing the violin under the guidance of Professor Volodymyr Trytiak. His talent was evident when he won the Mercer County String Competition in high school. This early success paved the way for his exploration of other musical instruments and genres, including the guitar, harmonies, and songwriting.

The camaraderie he experienced in the Plast Ukrainian Scouting Organization and the organization's camps left an indelible mark on him as a Ukrainian American performer. He recorded duets with singer Kvitka Cisyk (K.C. Cisyk) and performed at Ukrainian-themed festivals, such as the Garden State Arts Festival and West Bloor Street Festival in Toronto.

In 1972, Mr. Turchyn earned a bachelor's degree in international studies from Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ. Despite having an opportunity to pursue graduate studies in Ed-

inburgh, Scotland, he chose a different path. He moved back into a campus dorm with Andy Fed-iw and Jerry Kopychuk and they co-founded the country rock band Kinderhook Creek where his original songwriting skills shined. He also honed his classical voice techniques under the tutelage of Tom Rexdale, a prominent Julliardtrained rag-time piano player and vocal coach known as the "Professor of Singing." This diverse musical journey led to the band becoming arguably one of the most popular acts in New Jersey in the 1970s.

In the following decades, after Kinderhook's breakup, he explored and challenged himself playing with the Irish folk group Trinity II, delving and growing into alternative progressive music sounds with bands Bombay, and The World, a group led by guitarist/keyboardist Gunter Ford, drummer Ron Howden, founding member of British alt-rock band Nektar, and featured Mr. Turchyn who used his instrument like a lead guitar. In the 1990s, he formed Now Voyager, a seven-piece band, and produced original music compared by many to Steely Dan, and Boz Scaggs with a World Music sound. They headlined at Philadelphia's famous Blue Moon Jazz Club and New York's The Bitter End while recording his critically acclaimed album Currents.

That album was a precursor to his most notable project, Yuri Turchyn+GRUPO YURI (YTGy), a fusion of Latin, Jazz, and World Beat rhythms. The band's performances at top jazz clubs and festivals - including the Red Bank Jazz and Blues Festival, Point Pleasant Jazz Festival, Trumpets in Montclair; Sweet Sounds of Downtown Jazz Series; SOPAC; Burgdorff Cultural Center; Galeria West Art Gallery; Tim McLoone's Supper Club in Asbury Park among many others - were a testament to his versatility and adaptability.

Many formations with working musicians brought about the Jersey Sound at the Jersey Shore, including The Shades, Soul Purpose, and Rude Awakening. For 16 years, Mr. Turchyn performed at BobFest with Pat Guadagno & Tired Horses in a music tribute to Bob Dylan's birthday. As part of the New Jersey Superstars, he performed at the 2013 Sandy Hook and Garden State Arts Center benefits for victims of Hurricane Sandy.

Nicknamed the "Professor" with the Glimmer Grass Band, his fascination with Roots Music/ Americana Roots and Regional turned a synthesis of music styles - Cajun, Creole, Dixieland, Funk, Blue Grass and Jam Grass -into a dynamic flight of fancy with himself at the forefront. He embraced classic New Country and Minor Swing tune transformations into bluegrass and

jamgrass sounds.

Touring Italy, Mr. Turchyn was invited to the Umbria Folk Festival in Orvieto, Italy, performing with the renowned acoustic trio BARTENDER, recalling Afro-Cuban and Mediterranean sounds, as well as those produced by Stephane Grapelli and Bruce Springsteen.

As a recording producer and audio engineer for Wheatsheaf Studio Productions, Mr. Turchyn remastered a Spanish/Hispanic and Latin music ensemble compilation album called Juntamente for Teatro Si Productions. In that project, he arranged, performed, and produced, and mastered Vida Y Amor, which was released with Joanne Martinez and Paulo Pinho.

Yuri and his wife Christina Kotlar Turchyn moved from New Jersey in search of a slower pace and the artist community. He had been a Kent County resident since their move to Chestertown in April 2023. His final illness was caused by agrochemical industrial pollution.

A lifelong working musician, Mr. Turchyn excelled in his various roles as a singer-songwriter, arranger, session player, recording producer, and sound sculptor. His contributions to the history of music along the Jersey Shore will leave a lasting imprint on local music in the area. Mr. Turchyn leaves behind his wife, Christina Kotlar Turchyn; sister Luba Turchyn of Virginia; cousins Antoinette and Natalie Shilkevich of New Jersey; sisters-in-law Petrusia Paslawsky (with husband Nestor); Nadia Dubanowitz (with husband Joseph); Alesia Kozicky (with husband Roman); and nieces and nephews. He is also survived by his extended Shilkevich-Turchyn family in Ukraine, Poland, and Trinidad and Tobago.

A memorial liturgy and requiem was held on May 25 at St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Church in Passaic, N.J. Afterwards family, music families, and friends commemorated his life at the repast. A music event celebrating Mr. Turchyn's life's work is being planned.

Memorial contributions may be made to Yara Arts Group online at <https://www.justgiving.com/yaraartsgroupinc/> and the Bruce Springsteen Archives at the Center for American Music at Monmouth University at <https://springsteen-archives.org/give/>. In memoriam donations can also be made to Veteran Coalition International to support wounded Ukrainian soldiers at <https://www.vetcoa.org/>. Photo caption: Yuri Bohdan Turchyn, a world-class five-string Latin jazz violinist whose international flair crisscrossed cultures and blended Gypsy Jazz, Afro-Cuban, and Latin Beat into fusion symmetry and string swing, died on April 14. He was 73.