**2013 Cowboy Festival at the Hart**

*by Bill Blowers*

The Cowboy Festival weekend was just a little more exciting this year for supporters of Hart Park which had its own share of highlights throughout the weekend. For one thing, we hosted a brand new event (see sidebar)! Secondly, it was a moment of special pride when the father of ‘Friends’ board member Lisa Jaserie, none other than western star Stuart Hamblen, was among the inductees to the Western Walk of Fame. And, as in years past, on Friday and Saturday evenings the mansion was alive with sounds of authentic western music as leaders in the field donated their valuable time and talent for the betterment of a cause near and dear to our hearts, the support of Hart Park.

On Thursday evening, during the festivities on Main St. in downtown Newhall, three plaques were added to the Western Walk of fame: actor Lee Marvin, actor Rodolfo Acosta, and closest to our hearts, songwriter, radio personality, and one time presidential aspirant Stuart Hamblen. Famous for *This Old House* among other western hits, Hamblen joined an elite group of western stars whose accomplishments are honored by our own local version of the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Citing the accomplishments of all three honored on Thursday night, Master of Ceremonies Mayor Bob Kellar gave an informative and humorous brief history of each of their contributions and introduced their family members to a large group of onlookers who expressed their appreciation with loud and long rounds of applause. Several members of the ‘Friends’ board were in attendance to support and applaud all three inductees, but our applause was a little longer and a lot louder when Stuart Hamblen’s name was announced as our own Lisa Jaserie looked on proudly.

Academy Award winner Lee Marvin starred in dozens of films, often as the bad guy, but will forever be remembered for his part in the hilarious *Cat Ballou* where he portrayed a has-been drunken gun fighter. One scene that will remain forever in my mind’s eye, featured a thoroughly drunken Lee Marvin, on an equally wasted horse with its legs crossed, leaning up against the side of a building after an all night binge. As Bob Kellar asked at the event, how did they get the horse to do that?

Dante Acosta reflected on the induction of his late father, character actor Rodolfo Acosta, and also gave recognition to the hundreds of character actors whose roles in films allow the ‘stars’ of the films to shine. Often overshadowed by the big name stars, the character actors are the meat and potatoes of film and TV, providing the background and highlighting action, drama, and humor. As Dante said at the induction, “My dad would be so proud of this moment”.

Stuart Hamblen, who lived locally from 1978 until his death in 1989, was a songwriter, a radio personality, and ran for President against Dwight Eisenhower as the candidate for the Prohibition Party. He actually led in the early election returns which caused his daughter Lisa much concern. “I didn’t want to move to Washington”, she recalled while remembering her father’s exploits. Most famous for *This Ole House*, (1954) written on the back of a lunch bag, which became a major hit for Rosemary Clooney on the popular music charts, Hamblen’s other notable works are *It Is No Secret (What God Can Do),* and *Open Up Your Heart (And Let The Sunshine In).* He was inducted into the Western Music Hall of Fame in 1999. Speaking for the family at the induction ceremony, Hamblen’s grandson Bill Lindsay described him as a “Cowboys cowboy.”

On Friday night events moved up the hill and into Bill Hart’s mansion for the first of two evenings of up close and personal western music. Don Edwards and his lovely, delightful wife Kathy drove from their ‘small’ 210 acre ranch in Texas accompanied by their two Australian Shepherds (“they go everywhere with us”) to perform at the Cowboy Festival. It was, in fact, Don that originally began the tradition of musicians donating their time and talent to the fund raising activities that have allowed many of the improvements and maintenance activities that keep Hart Park the repository of Western tradition that it represents. (The park’s appearance has so improved – specifically the new fence – since their visit last year that they drove right past it when they first arrived in town, not even recognizing the place!) For two hours 70 people enjoyed ‘real’ Western music in the ambiance of the Hart living room as Don sang his many hits and related the background behind the songs and western music in general, at times accompanied by the entire audience as the sounds of familiar ‘oldies’ filled the room.

There isn’t enough room in this newsletter to list all of Don’s accomplishments and awards. A humble quiet man, he is a Grammy nominated singer-guitarist who tells the tales of the old west, ‘the way it was’ without the romance and phoniness so typical of the portrayals in popular western movies. A self taught musician, he has been performing since his early teenage years, and his music has gained such notoriety that many of his songs are included in the Folklore Archives of the Library of Congress. He has performed worldwide, has provided educational services at such prestigious schools as Yale and Rice, and he continues to find new ways to broaden the musical traditions that he loves and respects. He isn’t slowing down; in fact he seems to get busier each year, having recently added performances at the growing popularity of Cowboy Poetry festivals like our own annual event. Don gives of his time and talent freely to Hart Park as a part of his constant efforts to keep the traditions of the old west from drying up on the scrap heap of history. Hart Park is fortunate to have a man like Don give of his time, and he deserves our undying gratitude.

Saturday night saw another stellar performance of Western traditional music as the group *Riders in the Sky* filled the mansion with their unique brand of western music and humor. Ranger Doug (Douglas B. Green), “The idol of American Youth”; Woody Paul (Paul Chrisman), “The King of the Cowboy Fiddlers”; Too Slim (Fred LaBour), “The man of a Thousand Hats”; and Joey (Joey Miskulin), “The Cowpolka King” filled the living room with their songs of the old west and of life on the trail. It was indeed an honor to have such a stellar group who are willing to donate their time to aid in the preservation of our jewel of western tradition, Bill Hart’s mansion. It was thrilling to see the genuine looks of wonder and appreciation on their faces as they went through the mansion before the performance, truly impressed with the priceless art and artifacts and the status of its preservation.

*Riders in the Sky* have been performing as a group for over 30 years in more than 6200 live performances, almost 300 national television appearances, and appearing something like 700 times on the oldest continuous radio program in the United States, the *Grand Ole Opry*. Ranger Doug can be heard on Saturday evenings on Sirius/XM satellite radio performing his music and telling his tales of yesteryear. Their sketches often include allusions to something being done in a lazy or shady manner with Ranger Doug responding “You fellers know that would be the easy way, but it wouldn’t be the cowboy way!!”

About a week after their performance, “Too Slim”, Fred LaBour, wrote the following to Museum Education and Volunteer Coordinator Rachel Barnes:

*Howdy Folks,*

*I’m sending this to say a big western thanks for the great time we had at the mansion Saturday night. As I said during the concert, Riders in the Sky was born in a living room, and performing in William S. Hart’s living room, surrounded by all that art and history, sounded so right that it made a never-to-be-forgotten night for me.*

*Thanks for all the books, too. I’m a fan of old-time show biz and vaudeville and had no idea of Hart’s background. I hope our trails cross again soon.*

*“Great stuff, Bill, great stuff. And say. Bill, give old Fritz a pat on the nose for me, will ya?”*

*Best from the West,*

*Too Slim*

None of the events at the mansion would have been possible without the time and generosity of Museum Administrators Margi Bertram, Rachel and the many volunteers that make the event so successful. Each afternoon before the performances, the Hart living room was transformed from a museum setting into a miniature musical concert hall which entailed moving several priceless antiques and one of a kind original paintings, and setting up over 70 folding chairs to accommodate the audience. Then at the end of evening, putting it all back in place for the following days visitors to the Hart Mansion Museum. They worked until well after midnight each night willingly and cheerfully, taking great care to handle artifacts with extreme care and tenderness. It couldn’t be done without them.

*Bill Blowers is the husband of Friends board member Sherron Blowers. He is a retired business owner from the Santa Clarita area who, along with Sherron founded, operated, and recently sold a highly successful electronics manufacturing firm. Bill is an electronics engineer by education with a specialty in analog electronics design for products used in military pilot training. He has received three patents for unique electronic design. His avocation is writing and he hopes to soon publish his first novel. The recipient of two technical achievement awards from the Motion Picture Academy of Arts and Sciences, he has an ongoing appreciation for the technical side of movie making. He is active in community affairs, is a motivational speaker for high school students, spends several hours each day at the local gym, and enjoys cooking, meal preparation, and good wine.*