

## Johnny Hartman & Al Jarreau - Blues Stories

### Johnny Hartman

by Michael "Hawkeye" Herman

The Sotos Brothers, Jim and Tony, had a jazz club in Moline, Il, near the Rock Island railroad depot in the 1960s, if my memory serves me right. The club was called The Celebrity Club. They played as trio, "The Three Sounds," at their club and brought in 'big names' who they would back up.

On a weekend home to the Quad Cities from college in Iowa City in approximately 1965, I saw an ad in the local newspaper that the great jazz vocalist Johnny Hartman was going to be performing at the Sotos brothers club in Moline on Saturday night.

I made a point to attend.

[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johnny\\_Hartman](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johnny_Hartman)

I got to the club 'early', well before the announced start time.

There were only about 15 people in the audience, all of them seated at the tables spread throughout the room. It was a small barroom, capacity about 100 +/-.

I recognized Johnny Hartman sitting alone at the bar, near the front of the room, . Nobody else was sitting at the bar.

The Sotos brothers, in a trio format, took the little stage at the front of the room and began playing a tune to 'warm up the (non) crowd.

I was disappointed that so few people were on hand to hear this legendary jazz singing stylist. Standing just inside the front door and trying to decide where to sit, I thought to myself, "What the heck, why not sit next to Johnny Hartman at the bar? Why miss a chance to possibly meet a jazz legend.

I sat down on a barstool with one empty stool between Hartman and I. I ordered a drink. I said nothing to Hartman. I was too nervous to speak to him, and I didn't want to seem ... 'pushy.' Hartman was slowly sipping what looked like scotch and soda on the rocks, and smoking a Pall Mall cigarette. His pack of Pall Mall cigarettes and his Zippo lighter were on the bar next to his drink coaster and ash tray.

I took out a cigarette from the pack in my shirt pocket and I was digging in my jacket pockets for a book of matches. Hartman noticed my rummaging through my pockets for the matches, and he slid his Zippo that was on the bar to me and said, "Need a light?"

I nodded, picked up his lighter, lit my cigarette, thanked him, and I slid the Zippo back to him. After a a brief pause, I got up my nerve and managed to say to him, "I really love your music Mr. Hartman."

"Thanks so much. Call me Johnny. What's your name?", as he offered a handshake.

I shook his hand and said, "My name is Mike."

He motioned with an open hand for me to take the empty stool next to him.

"I don't want to intrude or bother you", I stammered.

"It's okay, Mike. Have a seat."

I moved onto the stool next to him and I took a sip of my vodka collins, puffed on my cigarette, and I tried to think of something 'jazz intelligent' to say to him.

"I love the album you did with Coltrane. Your version of "Lush Life" on that album is a favorite of mine."

(The album is widely considered a classic; "John Coltrane and Johnny Hartman", recorded in 1963 with Hartman – vocal, Coltrane – tenor sax, McCoy Tyner - piano, Jimmy Garrison - double bass, and Elvin Jones - drums.)

"Thanks so much. Yes, that was a nice session", he responded.

"Nice? ... it was great!", I blurted out.

He smiled and repeated his "Thanks so much."

The Sotos brothers trio were now done warming up the crowd and one of them was introducing Hartman. As the introduction was finished, Hartman took a puff on his cigarette, put it out in the ash tray on the bar in front of him, picked up his drink, and slid off the barstool to his feet, turned to me and said,

"Stick around. Don't go anywhere." He smiled.

"I ain't going nowhere." I responded.

He took the stage, thanked the band for the introduction, greeted the 'crowd', and opened with the great ballad "I Cover The Waterfront."

I was in jazz heaven. His voice was excellent, always smooth as silk, so expressive, and mesmerizing.

The small audience was in the palm of his hand.

He sang for about an hour, and finished the set with "Lush Life."

The audience showed their appreciation and respect with extended applause.

Hartman came back to the bar and sat down on the stool next to me, lit a cigarette, as the bartender set a drink in front of him.

A few members of the audience came over to the bar where he was sitting and gushed about how much they enjoyed the music. He thanked and shook hands with each of them.

As they drifted back to their seats, we were then again the only two seated at the bar.

I thanked him for doing the song "Lush Life."

"My pleasure, it's one of my favorites, too." he said with a smile.

We smoked our cigarettes, sipped our drinks, chatted quietly for the rest of his approximately 30 minute break. He initiated most of the talk by asking me questions about the Quad Cities, my background, my schooling, my musical interests, and my future plans.

Break over, the trio back on the stage giving him another very respectful spoken introduction, Hartman took a puff on his cigarette, put it out in the ash tray on the bar in front of him, picked up his drink, and slid off the barstool to his feet, turned to me and said, again, "Stick around. Don't go anywhere." And smiled.

He got the same response from me as previously, "I ain't going nowhere!"

His second set, last set, was longer than the first, was filled with a mix of jazz standards, ballads, and a few uptempo tunes for good measure, each of them sung with deep feeling and in his inimitable, recognizable, and seemingly effortless style.

Much appreciation from the small audience.

He came back to his stool at the bar, next to mine, sat down, lit a cigarette, and said,

"Thanks for sticking around., Mike."

"Are you kidding me? Thank YOU for the great music! I'll never forget this night!", I said.

"I'm really sorry there weren't more people here tonight."

"It's okay, I had a good time. I hope to see you again," he said.

"I hope so!", I responded, and as I got up from the bar stool to leave we shook hands, said our good-byes, and I left the great Johnny Hartman sitting at the bar lighting up a Pall Mall cigarette, as one of the Soto brothers came over to chat with him and settle up the evening's accounts.

I'm sorry to say that I never saw Johnny Hartman perform in-person again, but that night, meeting him, hearing him sing live, and sharing a bit of time with him is etched in my memory forever. A great and legendary jazz icon, and a true gentle-man. He died in 1983, succumbing to lung cancer at the age of sixty.

As Tony Bennett said in 2011, "Johnny Hartman is one of the great singers of all time."

NPR profile of Johnny Hartman:

<https://www.npr.org/programs/jazzprofiles/archive/hartman.htm>



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### Al Jarreau

Al Jarreau was a graduate student at the University of Iowa, in Iowa City, IA. He received his MA degree in vocational rehabilitation/counseling, graduating in 1964. He used to go to the Quad Cities to sit in and sing on weekends at the Sotos brothers bar in Moline. The Sotos brothers produced Al Jarreau's first album in 1965, in Rock Island, IL.

I was also a student at the U. of Iowa beginning in 1963, but, sorry to say, that I never heard of Al Jarreau until after he relocated to the West Coast and some years later he released his critically acclaimed debut album, "We Got By".

He's the only artist to have received a Grammy in three different categories: Jazz, R&B, and Pop music.

Jarreau's first album was recorded in Rock Island, IL , in 1965, at Studio Four.  
"1965 - Al Jarreau"

<https://www.discogs.com/Al-Jarreau-1965/release/2865345>

<http://aljarreau.com/about-al/>

<https://www.allmusic.com/album/1965-mw0000317608>

"More than ten years before he began to receive notice, Al Jarreau sat in with some friends in Rock Island, Illinois and recorded this superb album, his only strictly "pure jazz" recording to date. Accompanied by pianist Cal Bezemer, bassist Gary Allen and drummer Joe Abodeely, Jarreau already sounded quite recognizable. He comes across as a superior jazz singer on such numbers as "My Favorite Things," "A Sleeping Bee" and "One Note Samba," making this little-known LP (not yet reissued on CD) the high point of his jazz career, even though he apparently was not happy with its release over 15 years later. The album shows what could have been had Al Jarreau had the desire to be a jazz singer rather than chasing the money."

Recorded In June 1965 At Studio Four Rock Island, Illinois.

Recorded in June 1965

Studio Four Rock Island, Illinois

Sound Engineer : Jim & Tony Sotos

Producer : Jim & Tony Sotos

Tech Data:

Microphone : Neumann

Analog Tape Recorder: Ampex 300/3

Analog Tape Recorder: Ampex AG-350/1(Mono Mix)

Tape: Agfa PEM 468

[http://www.openreelrecords.com/opus/al\\_jarreau\\_1965\\_vol\\_1](http://www.openreelrecords.com/opus/al_jarreau_1965_vol_1)

[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al\\_Jarreau](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al_Jarreau)

Al Jarreau was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on March 12, 1940, the fifth of six children. Jarreau's father was a Seventh-day Adventist Church minister and singer, and his mother was a church pianist. Jarreau and his family sang together in church concerts and in benefits, and he and his mother performed at PTA meetings.

Jarreau was student council president and Badger Boys State delegate for Lincoln High School. At Boys State, he was elected governor. Jarreau went on to attend Ripon College, where he also sang with a group called the Indigos. He graduated in 1962 with a Bachelor of Science in psychology. Two years later, in 1964, he earned a master's degree in vocational rehabilitation from the University of Iowa. Jarreau also worked as a rehabilitation counselor in San Francisco, and moonlighted with a jazz trio headed by George Duke. In 1967, he joined forces with acoustic guitarist Julio Martinez. The duo became the star attraction at a small Sausalito night club called Gatsby's. This success contributed to Jarreau's decision to make professional singing his life and full-time career.

