



**Pantelis John “Demetri” Callas**

**June 7, 1942 - January 13, 2020**

**F**or many Frederick residents of a certain age, January 13, 2020, will be remembered as “the day the music died.” On that day, Demetri Callas, Frederick’s very own rock star, succumbed to heart failure in Las Vegas, Nev. He was 77 years old. Demetri had valiantly fought off the ravages of Parkinson’s disease for the past few years. If anyone had a robust zest for life and the will to live, it was Demetri, whose exercise regimen and self-discipline gave him the body of a Greek god. But in the end, his weakened heart could not beat any longer.

**HIS EARLY YEARS.** Demetri was born to Anastasia (Anna) Chantiles Callas and John Pantelis Callas on June 7, 1942, at Frederick Memorial Hospital. His parents owned and operated the Bluebird Restaurant at 81 South Market St. at the time of his birth. When he was in first grade, his teacher decided to shorten his given name of Pantelis to Penny. As he matured, Penny outgrew that nickname and assumed the name of his maternal grandfather, Demetrius, a third name that appears on his baptismal papers. He was thereafter known by the shortened version of that name, “Demetri.” Accustomed to his early nickname, some of his friends and family never did stop calling him Penny, though.

Astonishingly quick to learn, Demetri was invited to skip two grades in elementary school, but his parents rejected the idea for fear he would be emotionally immature if placed in a higher grade. When he was seven years old, he took his first music lessons – on the accordion. His teacher was Reuben Caplan, who owned Colonial Music, where locals could buy the latest records or a musical instrument in addition to receiving music lessons. Mr. Caplan was the first to note that Demetri was an exceptionally gifted musician. This is how the stellar career of the “Telecaster Master” began.

When Demetri was in what was called junior high school at that time, rock and roll began to hit the airways and TV screens across America. Once he heard the sound, he was hooked for life, as he often said. Photos of Demetri from this period reveal the enormous impact Elvis Presley had on him. In many, he sports Elvis’ ducktail haircut; in others, he is wearing clothing in Elvis’ signature colors of pink and black.

Surely a comet streaked across the sky the day 12-year-old Demetri bought his first guitar from Cole’s Pawn Shop. From that fateful moment on, the self-taught ace axe man never let go of the instrument that he would pick and strum with astounding dexterity for the next six decades.

**THE FIRST BANDS.** Pete Storm, the keyboardist in the first band Demetri helped form, The Playboys, vividly remembers how it all started. It was New Year’s Eve 1958 and he was babysitting for his baby brother when Demetri joined Pete and Hank Kline at the Storm home on Clarke Place. Demetri lived on the street parallel to Clarke Place, Mt. Olivet Blvd., and for reasons unknown, toted his guitar over for the evening. Before they knew it, Hank was banging on an overturned trash can that substituted for a drum kit, Pete was at the family piano and Demetri was picking out the sounds of rock and roll on his guitar. Demetri’s sister, Maria, sent over to the Storm home to check on her brother’s whereabouts, still recalls her surprise at seeing the nascent band.

As Pete tells it, within five months The Playboys were not only playing at local teen clubs and schools but also appeared on TV on “The Milt Grant Show,” the D.C. area’s answer to “American Bandstand.”

On a free evening during this formative time, Pete drove Demetri to Bladensburg to hear a group called The Perryman. The band had three sax players, and Pete recalls that “Demetri was never the same” after hearing that sound. Soon, he brought together The Shades, whose members were: Pete, drums; Tink Masser, sax; Jimmy Atchison (who, sadly, later died in Vietnam), sax; Larry Campbell, sax; Dwight Cramer, bass; Mike Stup, keyboard; and, of course, Demetri on guitar.

His first professional gig in D.C. came in 1960 when The Shades played Benny’s Rebel Room.



### ***The Shades***

*(From the left) Tink Masser, Larry Campbell, Jimmy Atchison, Demetri Callas, Dwight Cramer, Pete Storm and Mike Stup.*

**MAKING THE BIG TIME.** Music momentum went into full gear, and in time, Demetri joined musician Ronnie Dove, and, eventually, helped form The Bad Boys with two bandmates whom he loved and respected till the end of his days, Gary St. Clair and Danny Conway. In 1966, the group – along with Charlie Daniels – recorded a sleeper hit called “Black Olives” on Paula Records. Rock historian Mark Opsasnick has named that recording his all-time favorite rock and roll song.

The group was pretty much the home band at the Rabbit’s Foot when they caught the attention of Columbia Records. After signing on, the trio changed its name to Flavor and released three singles between 1968-69. “Sally Had a Party” hit No. 95 on Billboard Hot 100. Following an extended gig at the Flamingo in Las Vegas, they went their separate ways.



**FOUR SEASONS.** Not too long after Flavor dissolved, Bob Gaudio, keyboardist and songwriter for the Four Seasons, was scouting for a new singer/guitarist for the world-renowned group. One evening he dropped in at the Club Venus in Baltimore for a drink and caught Demetri's newest act. He was impressed and during a break asked Demetri if he'd be interested in joining the Four Seasons. Demetri responded that he'd get back to Bob with his answer, that he had to think it over. A few days later, he accepted the offer.

***Demetri with the  
Four Seasons***

*(From the left) Bob  
Gaudio, Frankie Valli,  
Demetri Callas and  
Joe Long.*



Joe Long, the gifted bassist and singer with the Four Seasons who continued his close friendship with Demetri after he left the group, remembers that when the newcomer drove to Joe's home in New Jersey, he had to teach him not only the guitar parts but also the vocal, which were adjusted for his voice. As always, Demetri was a quick study, and he performed with the group within a week of his arrival. Like original Season Tommy DeVito, he sang and played the guitar.

It is his masterful guitar intro that opens the group's No. 1 hit from the mid-1970s, "My Eyes Adored You," and his appealing voice (along with two more Seasons) backing up Valli in that popular tune. Demetri cut several albums with the Seasons, including *Chameleon*, which was released to critical acclaim and climbed the charts in the U.K. One track from the album, "The Night," soared to the No. 7 spot. Another, "Hickory," pierced the Top 100 in most U.S. national surveys. Known to Seasons fans as "that electrifying crazy man on guitar," he performed many Hendrix-like solos, displaying his virtuosity by playing the guitar behind his head and then, incredibly, playing the strings with his teeth. No wonder Joe remembers Demetri as "bigger than

life.” In a recent phone call, Joe reminisced about what “a great person” Demetri was and that “you couldn’t be around him without laughing.” That is a memory nearly everyone has of Demetri – he would enter a room and then own it with his charm and jokes.

Bill DeLoach, another former member of the Four Seasons, continued his close relationship with Demetri until his death. It was Demetri who had suggested Bill as a replacement for the Seasons’ departing keyboardist. Bill remembers him as “a very gentle spirit, very kind to all. He’d risk his life to save an animal.” Many of Demetri’s fans were unaware that animal rescue was one of his passions.

Demetri remained with the group for four years (1970 – 1974), playing such top-tier venues as Carnegie Hall and the Royal Albert Hall in London. He is immortalized as a Season on the *Jersey Beat* DVD, which includes his 1972 Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum performance of “Dawn.”

In a way, he never really left the group behind, as he and Frankie Valli always spoke on the phone several times a year. The two got along well, and Demetri never failed to call Frankie on the crooner’s birthday. As for the Four Seasons member he replaced, Tommy DeVito, Demetri always insisted that “no one can ever replace Tommy.” When the two met, they clicked. They truly enjoyed one another’s company, and Demetri would attend Tommy’s birthday parties until he became too ill. Happily, he and Joe Long met up in Atlantic City twice in 2015 for a visit of laughs and reminiscences that would make you blush. Joe often visited with Demetri when in Las Vegas, seeing him last at the nursing home in 2018 but keeping in touch online.

### ***Lunch in Las Vegas***

*Far left, Demetri and next to him, Joe Long. Center, in black shirt with red collar, Tommy DeVito. Mike Candito in khaki shirt, with his arm around Tommy. Bill DeLoach standing behind Tommy and Mike.*





**LAS VEGAS WAS HIS KIND OF TOWN.** On his own again, Demetri wasted no time and was soon performing with his bands the Hollywood Cool Breeze and, later, Demetri and the Flashbacks. Vegas always appealed to Demetri, and so his last two decades had him living there and playing local venues and internationally with Bill Haley and His Comets, the Greg Miller Elvis Show and other acts. His last gigs were at Wynn Las Vegas, playing with Mike Candito's talented combo. He played until he physically could no more.

**ACE GUITARIST AND PERFORMER.** Throughout his career, Demetri unfailingly earned the respect of his peers and the admiration of his fans, who always felt he was approachable and not full of himself. In his book *Roy Buchanan: American Axe*, Phil Carson grouped Demetri with the "other ace guitarists" on the D.C. scene in the early '60s: Roy Buchanan, Link Wray and Jorma Kaukonen.

In 2018, Demetri was inducted into the Maryland Entertainment Hall of Fame.

The 12-year-old kid with the pawn shop guitar distinguished himself as a music phenomenon. Demetri Callas made his mark as one of the most talented and masterful guitarists to emerge from this region, and he was Frederick's very own guitar god. The Frederick community was thrilled when Demetri would return for brief visits and perform, several times generously at benefits. His family will be forever grateful that when the tables were turned, Frederick gave back to Demetri and helped him at his most vulnerable time.

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Demetri is survived by his loving children Maria Hamby, Diana Toronto (Patrick), Demetri J. Callas and Jason Allen Callas; his grandchildren Mitchell, Travis, Tyler, Jessica, Damoni, David and Melina; his sister Maria C. Papageorgiou; his nephews John Papageorgiou and William Papageorgiou; an aunt, Victoria Overmiller; an uncle, Dr. Peter G. Callas; numerous cousins in the U.S. and Greece; his devoted pal Edward Kratzel; and his special lifelong friend, Kathryn Rice and her children, Danielle Burkhardt and J.C. Rice.

His marriage to the former Elizabeth (Betsy) Warfield ended in divorce.

Following Demetri's wishes, there will be no services following his passing.

*~M.C. Papageorgiou*

