

Guitarist Phil King loves to share the gift of song

Elvis, Buddy and Chuck were early influences

By Mary Ann Bullard
for the Daily Courier

Music is king and it's been a part of Phil King's life since he was a boy belting out "Don't Be Cruel" while walking through California citrus groves. Singing came naturally. He added an instrument to his talents when his parents gave him his first guitar at age 10, which he learned to play by ear.

"When I was young I emulated Elvis a lot, something I related to vocally. I listened to all the contemporary music of the time; Buddy Holly, Chuck Berry, Marty Robbins and Hank Williams all had a big influence on me. I've listened to Motown, surf, country and rock 'n' roll from the '50s on," he says.

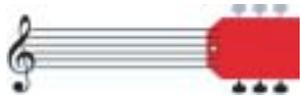
King admits to attending his school of hard knocks in night clubs in Ventura, Calif. Upon turning 21, he began playing at the Ban-Dar club, which was considered to be the pre-

mier entertainment venue in the country in the 1960s and '70s. He competed in weekly talent contests and won several. Mainly a lead singer and front man, King was encouraged to get serious about an instrument — more than just dabbling in guitar — for the sake of becoming a member of a working band.

"It was a matter of economics because the fewer band members, the fewer ways you have to split the money. So I chose electric bass." That led to his 1975 induction into the Ban-Dar house band, where he played six nights a week for a year. "I thought, wow, this is the big time."

The first band he put together was called Morning Sky, in 1970. The name was inspired by the after-hours jam sessions that lasted from 2 to 6 a.m. "We'd finish playing, go outside and see the morning sky lighting up."

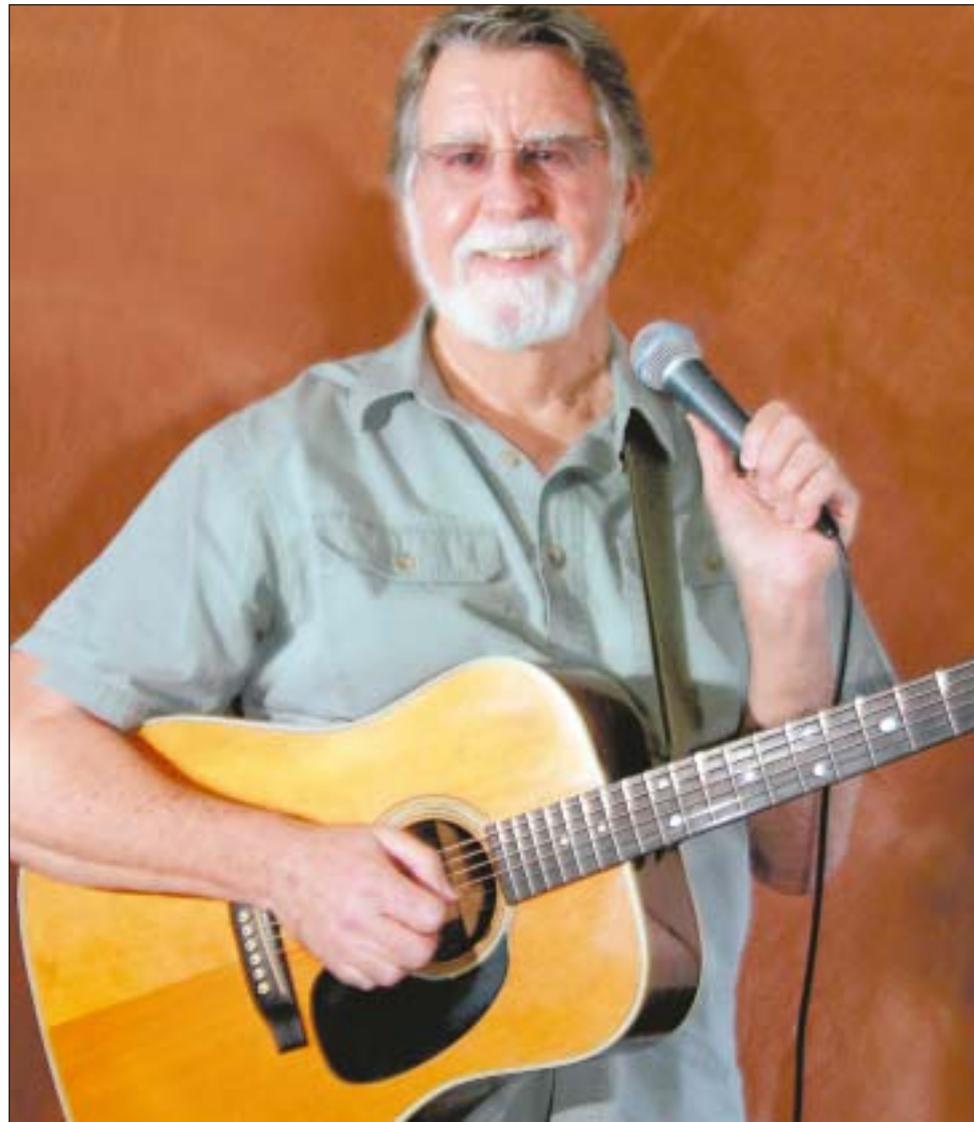
"Early on I thought about making music a full time job, but I don't think



Never too old to rock 'n' roll

Phil King

- **AGE:** 69
- **INSTRUMENTS:** Acoustic guitar and vocals
- **FAVORITE GENRE TO PERFORM:** Americana
- **FAVORITE GENRE TO LISTEN TO:** Appreciates most all types of music, but favorite is thoughtful ballads



TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier

Phil King with his wife's 1977 Martin D20 guitar.

I was ambitious enough to do what was required," he says. After marrying his musician wife and raising two children, music took a back seat, "because I saw the value of having a regular job with insurance. I worked in retail many years. But I've always played music at least part-time," he says, stroking his neatly-trimmed white beard.

Now retired from retail five years, King has been able to devote more time to singing and songwriting. Plus, it supplements his Social Security.

"I can't think of a more enjoyable, fulfilling way to earn some extra income," he adds with a smile.

For years, King played bass guitar in several bands. Now, however, he accompanies himself with acoustic guitar for gigs at wineries, the Royal Barge and the newly opened Rendezvous, among other venues. The soft-spoken musician also donates his time to various fundraising events for nonprofits, including the local Boys & Girls Club.

Not wanting to pigeonhole himself, he acknowledges relating to classic country music, as well as folk, R&B, light rock, and pop ballads.

"I sing my interpretation of a song. I don't think I sing with a twang," he

chuckles. "I like thoughtful ballads, but as a performer I know I just can't sing thoughtful ballads. Therefore, I have a mix in my repertoire. I strum with a pick and do some finger-picking."

Averaging six gigs a month, King also plays in Jacksonville, Talent and Eureka, Calif.

"I strive to convey emotion, whatever the song is about, or the spirit and mood of the song." King describes his music as organic. "Even though I'm amplified, I don't use special effects and don't use a drum machine. It's just the voice and guitar."

His current CD, "Just Me," is just that.

"I did all the parts, all the instruments: keyboards, drums, percussion; also lead and harmonies. The disc contains all original material. "I'm way overdue to get a second one out. I just need to sit down and record, I have plenty of material."

Looking to the future, King says, "I'd be happy to keep my singing voice for several more years, continue singing and playing and have people enjoy what I do. I appreciate the gift I have and I love to share it. My main thing is the vocals — that's my artistic form of expression."

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