

Beat Generation Legend Visits Georgian Court

One look at David Amram indicates a person of many facets.

Over his dark pinstriped suit, he drapes Native American beads that jingle musically when he walks. His cropped hair holds a bit of the wild curl that one sees in earlier pictures of the last surviving member of the Beat Generation. This group of authors and musicians, which included Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and Gregory Corso, revolutionized literature and music in the 1950s and early 1960s.

From Billy Strayhorn's jazz classic "Take the A Train," to a Sioux Indian folk song to a sing-along in Mandarin, Mr. Amram brought a multicultural musical experience to Georgian Court's Casino on Thursday, November 2. Joined by percussionist Kevin Twigg and bass guitar player John DeWitt, Mr. Amram inserted his delightful personality and anecdotes between each musical interlude, and included his own impressions of his legendary cohorts, dropping names like Kerouac and Bob Dylan like they were long-ago neighbors.

"We didn't know we were called 'The Beat Generation' until years later," he recalled, speaking to the group of nearly 200 people. "We were just a group of friends who supported each others' dreams."

Mr. Amram is an accomplished musician who plays more than two dozen instruments. Several times during the performance, he played more than one instrument per composition, moving from the piano to the French horn or to playing one and then two small, flute-like instruments at once. He coaxed various tones from a cowbell, and introduced the audience to exotic instruments such as the Asian Indian *shehnai*, also called the Indian oboe; the *Dumbek*, a goblet drum from North Africa and the Middle East; and even showed unexpected nuances in a tambourine performance.

Well-known for his work on classic film scores such as those for *Splendor in the Grass* and *The Manchurian Candidate*, Mr. Amram has also composed more than 100 orchestral and chamber works, written scores for many Broadway and film productions, and has composed two operas, including the groundbreaking Holocaust opera, *The Final Ingredient*. He also scored the 1959 documentary, *Pull My Daisy*, on which he collaborated with Jack Kerouac. His list of

collaborators reads like a Who's Who of music history and includes such notables as Leonard Bernstein, Dizzy Gillespie, Lionel Hampton, Charles Mingus, Thelonious Monk, Willie Nelson, Betty Carter, Odetta, Elia Kazan, and Tito Puente, among many others.

Several members of the Georgian Court community were also added to that list on November 2 when Mr. Amram invited them to read and perform with him during the course of the evening. Gail Holian '70, Ph.D., GCU professor of English; Christine Kephart, GCU lecturer in English and humanities; and student Jenine Francolla '07 each read from Kerouac's works as the trio played musical accompaniment. Professor Kephart also sang. Guest lecturer and poet John Petrolino, who studies Beat-era poets, also read from Kerouac's work and his own.

For Georgian Court senior and English major Rebecca Blieberg, the importance of the evening and the next day's master class, which Mr. Amram led, can't be overstated.

"Since he is the only one of the Beat Generation still living, it was essential that I be there to see him," she says. "It was awesome how he incorporated *On the Road* and the music. It was great to have that connection, and it's something I'll take with me to graduate school and into the classroom when I teach my students."

The evening ended with Mr. Amram's vintage inspiration.

"Express yourself. Pursue your dreams," he advised. "When people tell you 'You can't do that,' respect them, but go hang out with someone else. Someone who says you can."

*"Express yourself.
Pursue your dreams."*

David Amram plays the shehnai with the Dumbek around his neck so that he can switch back and forth.

