

Vale Larry Elam - March 2 1943 to January 29 2008  
By Brian Evans

"He was a perfect friend."

...not the usual way to start an obituary for a revered trumpet colleague. Usually one looks for trumpet-related hyperbole, but these opening words from Larry Elam's friend and colleague, Dylan Vaughn seem to be very apt. I cannot claim to have known him as well as many but I do know that, during his time in Australia, more than 35 years ago, he was loved, admired, revered and highly respected.

His story needed to be told and a few years ago when I contacted him, looking for an interview. His reply was friendly and warm but clearly indicated a reluctance to provide me with the news of the many exploits of which I knew he was famous. Reading the memories of, Dylan Vaughn, I now understand why. Larry was not one to "sound his own trumpet" in that way. He was a person who was "interested in what is happening now." He was "charming" and a consummate musician - "he was interested in the world"

Lawrence "Larry" Elam was born March 2, 1943. He was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Joe Elam. His hobbies were music and track. In high school Larry received his letter for track, was Honor Society president and played the cornet and was an officer in the band.

He studied trumpet at the Juilliard School of Music, New York, with William Vacchiano and in Paris with Maurice André

Aged 64 and only a month from retirement, Larry's car went off the road into a canal as he was driving to a rehearsal Wednesday, January 29. His body was not recovered until the next day.

I first heard of Larry in the early 1970's when he was living in Australia. Always a versatile musician, Larry quickly gained fame as a star attraction of the internationally renowned Daly Wilson Big Band, as well as distinguishing himself as principal trumpet of the Australian Elizabethan Trust Sydney Orchestra (later Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra) which plays for Opera Australia. Larry was the Principal trumpet for Prokofiev's "War and Peace" which opened the Sydney Opera House in 1973. A remastered video of that production was broadcast on TV in recent years and the trumpet playing is spectacular.

Larry toured Russia with Daly Wilson Band and was also engaged to back many international touring artists. His eclectic talents continued throughout his career.

This article draws heavily on the writings of Dylan Vaughn and I can do no better than the following from Dylan to describe Larry's career – and more:

*"Larry was respected and held in extremely high regard by his colleagues, and you would have to ask his fellow trumpet players to get the full story – it's a difficult instrument, yet it caused Larry no problems. He really made it look easy. His piano on the trumpet was the quietest and most controlled you have ever heard; he could play very high and legato in a whisper. His résumé is impressive: Frank Sinatra, Hamburg city Opera first trumpet, Sting, Ten of the Best, Bobby McFerrin, subbing with many of Germany's top orchestras, featured in the top 100 of Julliard graduates... and so on. The accolades are all there.*

*"Switching styles for him was a way to keep from getting bored: classical, jazz, rock, folk, and world music - he liked them all. He was never too shy to play and carried his axe with him everywhere – or at least within reach, in the trunk of the car – taking it out as often as possible.*

*"Larry identified himself as a musician by his conduct, not from anything he said. Playing music was his main activity. Everything else revolved around that. He didn't like walking, or care to spend time in the great outdoors. In fact, if he could, he would drive two blocks to spare the walking – that's not really an exaggeration!"*

During the well known trumpet festival in Bremen in 1991, where the crème de la crème of all trumpet players meet for master classes and competitions, Otto Sauter had the idea of putting together the ensemble Ten of the Best with ten of the best trumpet players in the world. In November 2000 they made their CD-debut with EMI-Classics. Larry was rated as one of the "Ten of the Best" trumpet players in the world. Those players include the likes of Alan Vizzutti, James Thompson, Miroslav Kejmar, Kenji Tamiya, and LARRY ELAM!

Dylan also shared many intimate aspects of Larry's life and personality. He described an articulate, loving, charismatic personality who was totally absorbed by the trumpet in all its guises, yet was a dedicated father and partner. He also points out that, whilst some folk did not "get" Larry,

*"If Larry was anything, he was charming. This word is accurately applied to the few and far between; Larry was a prize winner in this department. Anyone who really knew him was appreciative of that charm, his unfailing cheerful disposition,*

*and winning smile. We looked forward to warming ourselves by the Larry fire. There was a sense of security about him, that things were right and going well."*

Larry's eclectic musical taste and skills led him to move in a wide variety of circles:

*"He finally connected these circles at his funeral when the disparate groups of loving friends – and they did love him – met for the first time, together with his family, to say good-bye on Thursday, 07.02.08 at St. Ansgar's Church, Hamburg.*

*"Originally, Larry had intended to throw an open-house, musical, monthly get-together at his spacious 200 year old house; but in the words of Dorothy, Larry's mom, "God needed another trumpet player, so he took Larry." The long proposed musical get-together became his wake on March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2008, his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday." DV*

Larry is survived by his mother Dorothy of Olympia, WA, his sister, Carol Mattix of Dallas, TX, his children Debbie and Bruno who both live in Hamburg, and his much-loved girlfriend Klaudia Meyer. There are two nieces and one nephew in Dallas, their children and many cousins.

His last concert was just two days before his death – the Philharmonic brass section in the orchestra's chamber music series. It was a special farewell concert for him because he was due to retire in a few weeks. You can see it here: (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wYLMHCb90jg>). The Philharmonic's concert on 10th February was dedicated to Larry's memory and had a special page in the programme about him.

Personally, I will never forget his amazing jazz on piccolo trumpet at Sydney's Rocks Push night club (he had dropped in after a night at the opera!) or the incredible sound I heard coming from the opposite end of the pit when I first filled in playing offstage in Tannhäuser in October 1973. It was because he left the AOBO that I was able to gain a place there in 1975 (thanks Larry). Some of us "youngsters" had also been involved with performances of Aida that year and he was very kind to us, sharing stories and even handing out some surplus music that he did not want to pack for his trip.

At times like these, it is usually best to let a person's colleagues speak;

Bruce Hellmers, a colleague at the AOBO had some very important lessons with Larry in the early 1970's :

*".... Our [first] lesson was in his enclosed verandah overlooking William St. so I guess noise wouldn't be a problem! The flat was pretty basic and Bohemian in ambience. His phone never stopped ringing for sessions .... One particular caller asked him if he had a "high G" to use and so he just picked up his horn and blew a very strong specimen, saying " yeh, I think I got that one". .... His lessons were always entertaining, utilizing old photocopies of French studies which he would demonstrate with amazing facility and brilliance. It was very hard to come near that level of expertise but the model was there to emulate! ..... Larry made an indelible impression on me, showing a naive country boy what the trumpet was capable of as well as giving me an international perspective on trumpeting. His untimely death just prior to retirement is very sad but he will be remembered fondly by those who knew him as a terrific guy and a wonderfully inspirational musician."*

Larry went on to become a legend in Europe.

From Simone Young, Musical Director and General Manager of Hamburg Opera,

*"He was one of the orchestra's most beloved "characters" and this was evident at the memorial service for him here in Hamburg where colleagues and friends turned out in extraordinary numbers, and played "I did it my way" for the final hymn!*

*"One of the last pieces he played with me was the Mambo from West Side Story symphonic suite at our New Year's Eve concert last year - surely a memory that will take a long time to fade for all who were present.*

*"He is sadly missed by all here."*

*"I really loved him and his playing; we still can't believe that this incredible, wonderful man is gone.*

*"Forthrightness, vitality, love, power, resilience, joie de vivre, humour, dependability, boldness, intensity ... just a few of the words which occur to me when I think of you, Larry. I am eternally grateful for the time I spent with you."*

Martin Friess, colleague in the Hamburg trumpet section:

*"I played in the Hamburg Opera with Larry back in 1992 and just recently received an email from a mutual friend and musician as well in Hamburg that Larry has just passed away at 64yrs of age. .... Larry was a great guy, great trumpet player and person and will be dearly missed in the music world."*

John Aigi Hurn, Principal Trumpet, Orquesta Sinfonica de Galicia, SPAIN

*"Your highly motivated trumpet playing, full of energy and the sheer joy of playing, has been with me since I was twelve. Your approach to life, always so positive, shone out over everyone. We'll never forget you."*

Matthias Höfs (German Brass, Trumpet Professor at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater, Hamburg)

Tribute posting at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOEr6BP1Ozs>

Further surfing... <http://www.philharmoniker-hamburg.de/> (in German)

<http://www.hamburgische-staatsoper.de/> (in German and English)

<http://www.trompetenforum.de/TF/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=9552&start=0&st=0&sk=t&sd=a>

Link to photo-record of Larry's funeral

<http://bjorntoday.com/?page=Gallery&CID=39>