



Tom Huston, RIP

Hospice of Santa Barbara Benefit at SOhO Celebrates the Life of Santa Barbara Artist
Tom Huston

Tuesday, November 23, 2010

By [Josef Woodard](#) ([Contact](#))

HUSTON, WE HAVE A SOLUTION: It was back in the dark ages of the early 1980s when I first met the artist and character Tom Huston, as fellow howdy neighbors in the Park Building (aka the Fithian Building). I had been informed that my compact office space—a room for me, my careworn typewriter, and virally expanding record collection to call our own—had been recently vacated by Huston, who had moved to a larger space in the Fith. He had left the walls spattered with paint in an artistic palimpsest, wall-as-canvas style, thus requiring me to add a fresh, generic gray coat of paint to bring the space back to sobriety and proper dullness.

Meanwhile, down the hall, Huston held forth in his new creative dervish digs. The vari-use building housed mid-scale to upscale graphic art enterprises, the offices of the old *Weekly* (along with the *News & Review*, a parent to the eventually spawned *Independent*) and the beautifully scruffy, corner space-hugging Orange Door Gallery. Meanwhile, Huston's own new space was bustling with art, painting, art objects-to-be, and ideas-in-motion. Such was his way, then and through the end. Other artists in town veered toward commercial, landscapey or otherwise viably navigable fine art pathways, but Huston seemed to heed a wily heart, beholden to no particular -ism or institution. He would see me somewhere in public and yell out "Woodard!" before regaling or toasting me over some journalist gibberish I had recently scribbled.

As an artist, a filmmaker, and an all-around guerrilla life enthusiast, Huston was a force to reckon with around town for years upon years, making his sudden passing last year—out at sea, no less—a surreal shock, and one still not fully absorbed. I would see Tom, often with his wife, Charlene Pitcher, at concerts—including worldly ones at the MultiCultural Center—and hear

about idealistic projects such as the controversial public art project lightblueline, demonstrating the potential “new coastline” in Santa Barbara: thinking about global warming, and acting upon it locally.

Huston’s spirit—and his actual artwork—lives on. Next Tuesday, November 30, at SOhO, a special benefit for Hospice of Santa Barbara includes an art show early in the evening, and, as befits the memory of a music-lover, a show with the charming 101-year-old ukulele player Billy Tapia. This venerable musician channels his own life spirit into playing his instrument behind his back and wielding chops and vibes that are the envy of those a quarter his age.

As for Tom Huston, his art now triggers wistful admiration and new insights. It reminds me of my nagging curiosity about what art Huston had wrought upon my office walls, beneath the blandified exterior. (Check out tomHUSTONart.com.)

MAYAN MUSICAL ADVENTURISM, CONT’D: Contemporary music fans in Santa Barbara are a lonely breed, content to worship in private or head outta’ town for live inspiration. But there is always ECM, the long-standing and usually enticing UCSB-based new music group, which changes from year to year, depending on the musical interests of the student body. Tuesday at Lotte Lehmann Concert Hall, one of the specialized student musicians in the current mix will be undergraduate soprano Allison Bernal, playing a musical protagonist as shaman in ECM director Jeremy Haladyna’s “Xunaan Balam” (“Jaguar Queen”).

Yes, it’s time once again for the modernist Mayan within to emerge, part of composer Haladyna’s ambitious Mayan Cycle. Last year, Haladyna’s grand, ongoing Mayan Cycle hit a high point with a recording of selected pieces released on the Innova label. Also on Tuesday’s program are works from noted composers in the contemporary music orbit, from Olivier Messiaen to Kevin Volans (made somewhat popular through his Kronos Quartet work), Tom Johnson and Daniel Asia.

ANOTHER LIMB ON THE SONG TREE: For several years, music of an Americana-meets-singer/songwriter sort has been celebrated in the Song Tree series out at Goleta’s Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Church. This year, the compass also swings toward occasional classical concerts, such as this Sunday’s piano recital with Zeynep Üçbaşaran, a Turkish musician who studied at USC. On tap: works by Chopin, Mozart, Liszt, Weber, and Robert Muczynski.