

Don "Sugarcane" Harris

Don Francis Bowman "Sugarcane" Harris (June 18, 1938 – November 30, 1999) was an American rock and roll violinist and guitarist. He is considered a pioneer in the amplification of the violin.

Career

Harris was born and raised in Pasadena, California, United States. His parents were carnival entertainers. As a youth, he studied classical violin, and learned additional instruments including harmonica, piano and guitar.

Harris began performing with a doo-wop group, The Squires, which included his childhood friend, the pianist Dewey Terry.^[4] The Squires recorded for Vita Records. Harris performed in Little Richard's band in the 1960s.

Don & Dewey

Harris and Terry formed a duo in 1956 as Don and Dewey. They were recorded by Art Rupe on his Specialty label, mostly utilizing the services of legendary drummer Earl Palmer. The duo also recorded on Rupe's other labels, Los Angeles Spot and Shade. Don & Dewey had no hits as an act, but several songs they co-wrote and recorded became early rock and roll classics for other musicians. These include "Farmer John" (the Premiers and, later, Neil Young), "Justine" (the Righteous Brothers), "I'm Leaving It Up to You" (Dale and Grace), and "Big Boy Pete" (the Olympics). Harris was given the nickname "Sugarcane" by bandleader Johnny Otis, due to his reputation as a ladies' man.

Frank Zappa and John Mayall's Bluesbreakers

After separating from Dewey Terry in the 1960s, Harris moved almost exclusively over to the electric violin. He reappeared as a sideman with John Mayall & the Bluesbreakers and Frank Zappa, most recognized for his appearances on *Hot Rats* and on the Mothers of Invention albums *Burnt Weeny Sandwich* and *Weasels Ripped My Flesh*. His lead vocal and

blues violin solo on a cover of Little Richard's "Directly from My Heart to You" on *Weasel's*, and his extended solo on "Little House I Used To Live In" on *Weeny* are considered highlights of those albums. Zappa, who had long admired Harris' playing, reportedly bailed him out of jail, resurrecting his career and ushering in a long period of creativity for the forgotten violin virtuoso. He played a couple of live concerts with Zappa's band in 1970^[5] and performed on four of Zappa's solo albums.

Pure Food and Drug Act

During the early 1970s, Harris led the Pure Food and Drug Act, which included drummer Paul Lagos, guitarists Harvey Mandel and Randy Resnick, and bassist Victor Conte, who was the founder of the Bay Area Laboratory Co-operative. Conte replaced Larry Taylor, who was the original bass player. In their first concert, PFDA opened for Johnny Otis at El Monte Legion Hall. The audience was excited by Sugarcane's energy, his playing, singing and stage antics. While the performance showed the promise of the group, Don's issues with controlled substances was a constant struggle, eventually contributing to his death.

In the 1980s, Sugarcane was a member of the Los Angeles-based experimental rock band Tupelo Chain Sex.

Personal life and demise

Harris' marriage ended in divorce He had a daughter and two sons. He struggled with drug addiction throughout his career. For most of his later years, he suffered from pulmonary disease. He died on November 27, 1999 in his home in Los Angeles, California, at age 61.