

# History of the Bach Dancing & Dynamite Society and the Douglas Beach House

How I started a unique, somewhat personal, music venue that reflects the founder's taste in a diversity of music styles. **by Pete Douglas**

**Nobody planned its beginnings.** It just evolved from the first private jam sessions at home in the summer of 1958. Growing up on the beaches of Manhattan and Hermosa in LA, I hung out in jazz clubs hearing Swing and early Be Bop and the cool sounds of West Coast Jazz of Shorty Rogers, Art Pepper, Shelly Mann, Chet Baker at the Lighthouse Café. Graduating from Santa Barbara College in 1955, I had no thoughts of operating a conventional jazz club, and eventually was hired as an Adult Probation Officer in San Mateo County just below San Francisco. Needing to get back to the beach, I purchased an abandoned beer joint on the ocean in Half Moon Bay, proceeding to live in it like a refugee from the Beat Hipster scene of the 50's. I was later to be canned from the Probation Dept. for leading an undesirable life for a County official.

The oceanfront cottage attracted the usual wayward, if not dysfunctional, youth seeking action at the beach. From the beginning when my wife and I and our first child moved into the seven-stool beer joint in November 1957, open spontaneous gatherings evolved. Regular drop-ins included hard-core Beats, artists, gays and SF show people.

In the early 60's, during one of these weekend soirees, a few drop-ins decided to set off dynamite on the beach while others were swing dancing to JS Bach, thus the name, Bach Dancing and Dynamite Society – the name being a put on, as we thought of ourselves somewhat Bohemian, hardly a “society.”

However, the first of many Jazz jam sessions began in the summer of 1958. After becoming a registered non-profit for the musical arts in 1964, regular Jazz and Classical programs began, open to the public. After 50 years, the rest is history.



**I was, and still am, on a musical adventure** that needs a live, not virtual, audience to enjoy and support it so that the Bach, as well as other smaller venues will continue to give people an authentic experience and human touch with live talent. Perhaps new boutique venues will emerge for discerning audiences who will be prepared to pay the price to “be there”, not in an impersonal crowd.

The Bach Society may be an anachronism from the past that presented many now deceased jazz musicians. We hope, however, a it will continue as a good example for future presenters and a comfort to musicians.

**Regarding the future of the Bach,** under the right conditions, I'm prepared to sell the Douglas Beach House to the Bach non-profit organization. However, I may need some equity for my survival. The Society presently has little funds to purchase California beachfront property. If any organization with deep pockets may be interested, just call to open a dialogue.

Yours, Pete Douglas

Founder, Bach Dancing & Dynamite Society  
Owner, The Douglas Beach House  
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