

Doherty's voice was foundation of The Mamas and Papas

By John Stewart
Special

When John and Michelle Phillips decided they wanted to start a band in the early '60s, they thought first of a guy - or rather the voice of a guy - that they'd heard sing while they were on a Hootenanny tour in the southern U.S.

They'd heard that his group, The Halifax 3, had just broken up. The Phillipses put out word that they wanted to get in touch.

Not long after, Denny Doherty showed up on their doorstep. They sang together that day and by the end of it, John and Michelle knew they had the foundation of their new group.

"Denny's voice really was what started to create a sound we loved," Michelle said in a documentary made for PBS to celebrate the beautifully layered harmonies of the Mamas and the Papas 40 years later.

He was the one who lobbied to have his friend Cass Elliot join the group to create what he called "Harvey - the fifth voice that was created when the four of us sang together."

Coupled with John's imaginative songs, they created the blend of nuanced harmonies and stunning vocal arrangements that earned The Mamas and Papas a spot in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1998.

Doherty was inducted into the Mississauga Walk of Fame on a very rainy Sunday afternoon, Sept. 13.

The group only lasted two-and-a-half years, but nothing evokes the '60s era of love and peace and San Francisco quite as quickly as their California sound.

Doherty was a coastal guy, all right, an

East coast guy originally from the Maritimes. When musical work dried up in Halifax in the mid-'80s and a bunch of his peers moved to the GTA, he moved his family to Mississauga because he'd heard it was a



Emberly Doherty, daughter of singer Denny Doherty of The Mamas and Papas said her father would have been very proud to be inducted into the Mississauga Music Walk of Fame in Port Credit. Doherty moved his family to Mississauga in 1986 and lived here until his death in 2007. Photo by John Stewart

great place to raise kids. He lived here until his sudden - and far too early death - in 2007 at age 66.

He wrote much of *Dream a Little Dream, The Nearly True Story of The Mamas and Papas*, in Mississauga. It is still running in periodic stage productions in Canada and the U.S.

Doherty also became a star to a new generation of kids. When he went to Clarkson Village for ice cream at his favourite Baskin Robbins, he'd often be recognized by the toddlers first - as the Harbour Master from the *Theodore Tugboat* series on CBC-TV.

Then their mothers would recognize him as an old rock 'n' roller.

He would be heartened to know that his two grandchildren still enjoy watching *Theodore Tugboat*, or "the grandpa show" as it's known in their household.

The Doherty homes in Park Royal and,



later in Lorne Park, were filled with friends, music, laughter and story-telling, especially by the patriarch of the house who was a master of the art.

Although most people would associate his voice with the opening strains of *Monday, Monday* or the line, "All the leaves are brown" from California Dreamin', Doherty's favourite Mamas and Papas' song was a ballad called *Dancing Bear* which truly shows off his legendary voice in its purest forms.

John Phillips had long recognized the magic of the Doherty sound. He not only wrote great songs for it but he acknowledged it when he penned a short musical selfie of the group called *Creague Alley*.

It provides a fitting epitaph for that special sound: "Denny, you know there aren't many/Who can sing a song the way that you do." There certainly were not.

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