



## Aiken, South Carolina

CELEBRATING 175 YEARS OF CHARM AND BEAUTY

"Aiken Place" Copyright Jim Harrison 2009

# Mr. Harrison

## *A Unique Opportunity to introduce your students to South Carolina's renowned Artist – Jim Harrison*

As part of "Celebrate Aiken" – the 175th Anniversary Celebration of the City of Aiken, South Carolina – the Aiken Center for the Arts in downtown Aiken is hosting "Jim Harrison: A Retrospective" now through May 8, 2010. The exhibit tells the story of Jim Harrison's life and work through words and images from his youngest days as the "class artist" in school to his career as a world renowned artist.

**The Retrospective provides a unique opportunity for you and your art students to learn more about Jim Harrison and his development as an artist. A biography of Jim Harrison is included as well as possible discussion questions that could be used during or after a visit to the exhibit. To make arrangements for your class to visit the Aiken Center for the Arts, contact them at 803-641-9094 or [acaexecdir@bellsouth.net](mailto:acaexecdir@bellsouth.net).**

Jim Harrison loves the South and rural America like no one else. With a passion for preserving a part of America that is beginning to slip away far too quickly, he evokes a true appreciation for the old and forgotten. He sees beauty at every turn. His paintings of landscapes and seascapes, old buildings and barns, allow Harrison, in his tranquil way, to place you in his work...therefore placing you in his life. He can make you enjoy the skies you haven't slowed down enough to notice and the land and sea you didn't take the time to appreciate. Mr. Harrison's work reflects on times past...what once was, what should have been, and what we long for again.

## **JIM HARRISON BIOGRAPHY:**

Since 1970, individuals and corporations have sought out Jim Harrison's work. Regardless of the image reflected in the work, they talk about their desire to own "a Jim Harrison." A Jim Harrison painting is much more than an image on canvas. It is an experience ... a part of the artist ... a shared remembrance of the values that made up our country ... a piece of American history. Mr. Harrison's work becomes part of the family's most valued possessions and are already being passed from one generation to the next. His paintings and work will stand the test of time. His work will also be remembered because it is capturing a part of our South Carolina rural history that is quickly passing away.

Jim Harrison was born in his grandmother's house in Leslie, Georgia, January 1936. When he was six years old, his father took a job with American Telephone and Telegraph Company, and his mother worked as a Southern Bell switchboard operator in Denmark, South Carolina. The Harrisons worked hard to raise and educate him and his younger brothers, Phil and Wendel.

Mr. Harrison was very involved in the activities of Denmark High School. As the "class artist" he was kept busy on the annual staff, school newspaper, and class bulletin boards. His first love was athletics in which he excelled and was named all state in both football and basketball. He held the South Carolina high school state record for scoring 71 points in one basketball game.

During high school summer vacations, Mr. Harrison worked as an assistant to a seventy year old sign painter, J.J. Cornforth. The elder gentleman taught the aspiring artist how to letter, and for several summers the two traveled the rural areas around Denmark painting Coca-Cola bulletins on the sides of barns and country stores.

After high school graduation Mr. Harrison entered the University of South Carolina. Torn between his love of art and the enjoyment of athletics he pursued a dual major in art and physical education. In 1960 he embarked on a successful eleven-year high school coaching career. At three schools he coached football, girls' basketball, and baseball, and he never experienced a losing season as a head coach. But when the time came to choose, his passion for creating memorable works of art and preserving rural America was the stronger influence. In 1970 he declined an offer to join the Furman University football coaching staff and returned to his hometown of Denmark, South Carolina to pursue art as a career.

In 1972, Mr. Harrison had no knowledge of the art market, but with enthusiasm he headed to New York City for the Fall Greenwich Village sidewalk art show. His only sale during the three-week show was an \$85 original, and it cost him \$800 in expenses. Several years on the sidewalk circuit served him well as he learned his trade and the business of art. After several years he had 10 galleries selling his originals. He published his first limited edition print, "Coastal Dunes" in 1973 gaining the attention of the nation's leading publisher of limited edition art prints, Frame House Gallery of Louisville, Kentucky. In 1975, Frame House released their first Jim Harrison print, "Rural Americana" and that print projected Mr. Harrison on the national scene through the publisher's network of 600 dealers. He became the undisputed nation's leader in rural Americana art, and many of his prints have appreciated up to 3,000 percent of their original value.

Mr. Harrison's success is evidenced by his more than 38 years as a full-time artist. Turning his back on the more familiar path – a career in high school and college athletics – he embraced his dream to become an artist. With talent, hard work and perseverance, he has more than 100 sold out limited editions of the prints made from his paintings and thousands of collectors of his work across the country. Mr. Harrison's paintings are featured in personal and corporate art collections across the country including The Coca-Cola Company in Atlanta, Georgia; The Maytag Corporation in Newton, Iowa; Philip Morris Company in New York, New York; The Leo Burnett Company in Chicago, Illinois; and the Augusta National Golf Club in Augusta, Georgia.

Mr. Harrison has also had successful one-man shows at the prestigious Hammer Galleries in New York City and the Conacher Gallery in San Francisco. His paintings have also been included in the annual shows at the prestigious National Academy Gallery in New York.

In addition, Mr. Harrison has received recognitions such as being named by the Governor of Kentucky to the Honorable Order of Kentucky Colonels, having the park in Denmark named in his honor, and being named a

Distinguished Adjunct Professor at the University of South Carolina Aiken. He has served on the boards of South Carolina National Bank and Security Federal Bank, on the board of Vorhees College and Denmark Technical College, and on the board of the Denmark Downtown Development Association. Also, being a strong advocate for the mentally ill, he served on the board of the governor's legislative council for mental health and mental retardation at an earlier time in his life and worked tirelessly in this effort. In 2008, he was honored by the Governor of South Carolina with the prestigious Order of the Palmetto Award for his many years of service as a citizen of our state. Also in June 2008, he was honored for his many contributions to art and the State of South Carolina by the South Carolina House of Representatives. Citing Harrison as a "nationally and internationally acclaimed artist" and as "one of the Palmetto State's Chief Art Treasures," the resolution congratulated Harrison on his more than 38 years as a successful artist and on the occasion of his 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Jim Harrison Gallery in Denmark, SC.

He has been a licensee of The Coca-Cola Company for more than 10 years and produces The Coca-Cola Calendar for collectors each year. This relationship is a visible demonstration of his love of the well-known trademark which he first painted on the side of an old barn as the 14-year-old apprentice of the elderly sign painter, J.J. Cornforth.

In addition to his artwork, Mr. Harrison is the author or illustrator of several books including: *Pathway to a Southern Coast*, *Country Stores*, *American Christmas*, *The Passing*, and *Jim Harrison His World Remembered*. He is currently working on a book proposal on the Palmetto Tree for the USC Press.

Over the years, Mr. Harrison has also shared his success with countless charitable organizations including the American Dietetic Association Foundation, USC Aiken, the Agricultural Heritage Center in Blackville, Aiken County Helpline, SCETV, 4-H Clubs, local churches, and many more organizations. Most recently he worked with the University of South Carolina on a fundraiser for their Alumni Center with a print of our state's beautiful palmetto tree. He was celebrating his 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a graduate of the University and wanted to show his support in a special way. Mr. Harrison gives back this way because he has a true commitment to helping others and believes he should use the success he has experienced with organizations across our state. Most recently, he was selected as the official artist to create the "Celebrate Aiken" poster for the 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the City of Aiken, SC.

From his earliest experiences in life, Mr. Harrison developed a passion for preserving the past, especially rural America. "I sincerely try to put meaning into my work in hopes it has some historical value," he says. "With my paintbrush and pen, I sometimes feel like I'm just one step in front of the wrecking ball. For more than half a century, I have had a love affair with old buildings, old things, and old ways. Preserving them in at least some small way is important to me."

You will come away from Mr. Harrison's art with a greater understanding of yourself. His paintings have stirred feelings and memories in everyone—from children to the gentle elderly. As anyone who has viewed Mr. Harrison's work can tell you, his passion for all that he paints comes through with each stroke of his brush. Those of us that are fortunate enough to have the opportunity to see Mr. Harrison's paintings can draw from his work the peace and tranquility we seek.

### **POSSIBLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- Reflect on the different techniques used throughout Jim Harrison's many years as an artist? What changes did you see in materials, techniques and use of color?
- What subject matter did you see used by Jim Harrison and how did he use his subject matter to communicate a visual image that has personal meaning?
- Describe the different types of media and differing styles you observe in Jim Harrison's work? What changes did you see in materials, techniques and use of color over this many years as an artist?
- Analyze and describe the intention of the artist in your favorite piece of artwork in the exhibit and justify their interpretation.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the artwork in relation to the application of elements and principles of design and other compositional structures and strategies.