



# Ready to put your hands together for not-so-polite festival performer?

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**C**all Gerry Phillips a hand musician or a manualist. If you must, call him a hand farter.

When Phillips plants palms together to produce music with a certain flatulent flair, he feels no need to offer an "Excuse me."

"It should be funny first, then it should be amazing," said Phillips, 48, whose day job is owner of a Waterford, Mich., gun shop. "People love to laugh at you first, then they open their mouths and say, 'That guy is accurate.' 'That guy is a real musician.'"

Phillips will perform "Classical Gas" and other songs for the audience of the Gangrene Film Festival, which takes place next Friday in Layton's Kenley Amphitheater.

Craig Nybo, spokesman for the festival, said Phillips is amazing.

"We were lucky to get him," Nybo said. "He can play any melody, and he does it with remarkable detail. He plays 'Bohemian Rhapsody,' and we got him just before Brian May called him about a record contract."

May was a guitarist for British rock band Queen, which recorded "Bohemian Rhapsody," a 1975 song that Queen singer Freddie Mercury wrote for his band. "Bohemian Rhapsody" enjoyed a pop revival after it was featured in the 1992 film "Wayne's World."

"Brian May found my 'Bohemian Rhapsody' video on YouTube, and put it on his Web page," said Phillips, whose first name is pronounced as Jerry. "He asked me if I wanted a recording contract, and I'm flying to Manchester, England, on Sept. 15 to meet him. I'm so excited, I'm still shaking. It's quite a compliment."

## First notes

Phillips said he first discovered his skill at age 9, at



Gerry Phillips brings his unique musical stylings to the Gangrene Film Festival in Layton.



**VIDEO:** Link to Gerry Phillips' YouTube videos

a party. A photographer trying to quiet the children and get them to look at the lens put hands together and made a sharp squeak. Within minutes, Phillips had reproduced the sound with his own hands.

"I was playing songs within weeks, then got into classical, and within a year I was doing that well," he said.

"My mother caught me and washed my hands out with soap," Phillips joked. "Really, nobody could believe I would put in all the time to practice, or that I could do all this."

By his teens, Phillips was performing at school talent shows, bringing down the house with Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, "Black Magic Woman," "The Blue Waltz" and "You Make Me Feel Like Dancing."

By age 16, Phillips earned money performing in bars, and sometimes performed with local bands.

Then things got quiet.

"I was trying for years to get some notoriety, to show what I could do," Phillips

said. "Then a few years back, I found YouTube and started posting my videos. Now I have 105 videos of the hardest songs I can play."

The most challenging are "Flight of the Bumble Bee" and "The Cliffs of Dover." Ballads include the lilting "Stairway to Heaven."

"Basically, what I have is a wind instrument, like a saxophone or trumpet," Phillips said. "Once you are playing along, you become that. You make the same sound with the vibration of your skin."

Phillips is one of a dozen or so manualists worldwide who perform publicly.

Trying to teach people manualism is usually unsuccessful, he said.

"It's 100 percent feel," he said. "How can you teach someone to feel something?"

## On stage

Since his YouTube debut, Phillips has performed on "Jimmy Kimmel Live!" and made appearances in Australia, England and Germany. He takes no special care of his hands, except for a preshow sprinkle of baby powder to control sweating.

"I'm just a regular guy with a real job," he said. "I can play anywhere, anytime, except maybe in below-zero weather. Other than that, there are no restrictions on what I do. If you do anything for 40 years, you should be good at it."

Phillips understands if first-time listeners find his art form weird. He just wishes they wouldn't assume he is, as well.

"People think I must live in the basement of my mother's house if I have the time to get so good at this," he said. "I'm married. I have a family and a dog. I live in a condo. I own a business. I do have a life. I just also have this music, which I can perform with extreme accuracy. I get comments from professional musicians who are amazed by what I can do. They also think it's really cool I don't have to drag equipment along with me."