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Column | Tom Petty-signed guitar could be source of lasting San Diego legacy



Tom Petty and his band signed this guitar when they performed Sept. 17 at KABOO Del Mar. Starlight amphitheater supporters had requested their autographs for an upcoming fundraiser to raise funds to restore the theater but now plan to consign this guitar separately for auction. (Jamie McGuffee)



By **Diane Bell**

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The Starlight Bowl in **Balboa Park** is about to get a helping hand from a very unlikely source — musician **Tom Petty**.

Before he unexpectedly died at age 66, he and his band members signed a Fender Stratocaster guitar that will be used in renovating Starlight theater.

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The whole band signed,” said **Steve Stopper**, the galvanizing force behind the grass-roots Save Starlight initiative. From KAABOO, Petty and the Heartbreakers went on to perform at the Hollywood Bowl before his death Oct. 2.

The Stratocaster was one of several donated guitars that friends of the Starlight are asking musicians to autograph for an upcoming celebrity guitar auction to raise money to renovate and reopen the theater for community performances and use.

Stopper said the Starlight supporters contacted auction specialists and is considering offering the guitar to Guernsey’s auction house in New York for its Dec. 2 sale. Co-founder **Arlan Ettinger** told Stopper that signed guitars are easy to come by, but this one has a more compelling story.

“We would be thrilled to offer it for sale,” Ettinger told me. He noted that a **Jerry Garcia** guitar that sold for \$800,000 15 years ago was re-auctioned on behalf of the Southern Poverty Law Center last May and brought in close to \$3.5 million.

The fact that the Fender guitar “was signed shortly before his (Tom Petty’s) death and will support a worthy nonprofit cause is a game changer in a good way,” Ettinger explained. He declined, however, to speculate on its value.

The Dec. 2 auction will feature one, and possibly two, **Jimi Hendrix** guitars, Ettinger said, as well as a bass guitar played by **Bruce Springsteen** during his debut album, two Garcia acoustic guitars and the first guitar played by **Madonna** on stage.

“We’re thumbs up, ready to go,” he said of the possible consignment. Stopper said he expects the Save Starlight board will finalize its auction plans soon on offering the guitar to the auction house.

Circle of life: Sara Stelzer, 18, had no way of knowing she would help save five lives, or that she would be an honoree in the 2018 Rose Parade.

Less than two days after falling ill, the San Diego State freshman succumbed in the hospital to bacterial meningitis. As a registered organ donor, however, Sara's death in 2014 led to five other people receiving seven of her organs.

Lifesharing announced that her floral portrait will join those of 43 other U.S. organ donors on the 2018 Donate Life float in the New Year's Day Rose Parade.

Sara's family, of Carlsbad, has since worked to raise awareness about meningitis and will help decorate the float.

Looking back: A **DeLorean** time machine will be parked in front of the Vintage Village Theatre in [Coronado](#) on Wednesday. It's a replica of that used in the 1985 movie "Back to the Future," which will be shown at 5 p.m.

It marks both the 70th anniversary of the art deco theater and the upcoming Coronado Island Film Festival Nov. 9-12. An added attraction that evening is the appearance of L.A. cinematographer **Dean Cundey**, who worked on all three "Back to the Future" films.

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