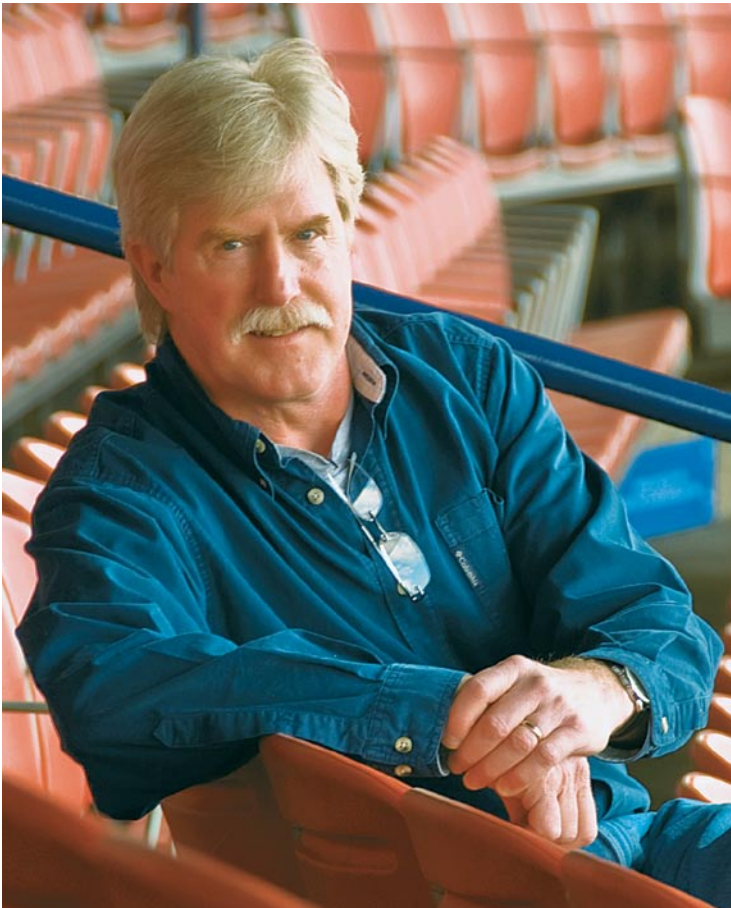


**TAKE ME OUT TO THE
BALL GAME WITH...**



Johnny Jackson

Singer/Songwriter, Sculptor, Woodworker

Whether sculpting exquisite wooden whales, recording his original diverse styles of music, designing and making high end furniture or relaxing at the Reading Phillies games with his family, Johnny Jackson lives life at a dizzying pace. Jackson, 59, is also the composer of the Reading Phillies' theme song (*Baseballtown... The Song*) heard before each game. Most of his family is involved with the club to varying degrees, while Johnny has assumed the role of resident songwriter.

BCL: Let's discuss your professional life; I understand you're an artist and musician?

JJ: Yes. Right now I'm primarily a singer/songwriter, recording artist and producer, having just retired my West Reading business, Jackson Woodworks, after 30 years of commissions for original designs in sculpture, furniture and cabinetry.

My musical career began in the 70s founding Johnny's Dance Band, a popular Philly group on the RCA label. I've written over 120 songs and recorded about half.

BCL: Do you have any recent CDs?

JJ: Yes, two new releases: *Songs from Baseballtown*, inspired by the Reading Phillies and on sale at the ball-

park benefiting Baseballtown charities. You'll hear selections when you make it to a game. Also, *Round trip* combines recordings of my 1979 band, Boomer, and new tunes accompanied by friend and virtuoso Karl Frick, recorded at his Barto, PA Lakestone Studio.

BCL: Tell me about your family. How did you become involved with the Reading Phillies?

JJ: I got involved by writing their theme song and singing the national anthem at games. However it was my son Matt, 29, who provided the "in" for our family. After three internships and graduating college with a degree in sports management he landed a full-time job with the organization. Our daughter Sarah, a college student, has been a "Diamond Girl" for five years seeing to the various tasks at game time. My wife Jan, a school nurse practitioner for the Reading School District, and son Joe, 27, attend games whenever they can.

BCL: What is Matt's job at the Reading Phillies?

JJ: Matt does sales, graphic arts, on-field entertainment and whatever else is needed by the Reading Phillies. Together with his athletic co-workers he performs a lot of the skits between innings that keep the fans happy and engaged. Matt is the "Crazy Hot Dog Man," the "vendor" who rides the ostrich and hurls hot dogs into the crowd. You've never caught anything so warm in your life! This character has given Matt a lot of notoriety on T-shirts, billboards and TV spots around Berks County.

BCL: What typifies the Reading Phillies experience? Give an example.

JJ: The quality of AA baseball is very close to major league but players come and go, like Ryan Howard, so it's fun but a little sad, too. The organization is like family to me. Once at a game, I was seated next to Michael Bourne's father. It was his birthday. He told me his son was going to try to hit a home run as a birthday pres-

ent. When he did, Mr. Bourne said he wished he had the ball. I hailed my son Matt, who put the search in motion. Soon, the center fielder's dad had the home run baseball in his hands. He was very grateful and it was really heartwarming.

BCL: What is it about the Reading Phillies that makes them so special?

JJ: Whatever is going on in your life, you can put it aside for a few hours when you go to a game. There are all walks of life here, many different people who gather together with one thing in common, to root for the hometown Phillies. I love this town and I love this baseball club! They are sincerely involved with the people of Berks County. We all connect with the franchise, and consider them special friends. This inspired me to write the theme song and convey the feelings you get when you sit in the stands here in Baseballtown, USA. This might be baseball heaven after all.

BCL: Looking ahead to the future where do you see yourself going?

JJ: I will continue writing, producing and recording my music. A band may also be in the cards soon. My woodworking arts will proceed less competitively, reserved for patrons and family. You will find me attending Reading Phillies games, watching sunsets and drinking in the experience. When I'm gone, you can remember my name when you walk into the ballpark. Just look down. It's on a commemorative brick - that raised money to build Lauer's Park - my son Matt purchased for me Father's Day a few years ago. I wouldn't mind if he put a sprinkle of my ashes underneath it so I can always be a part of this scene. ■BCL

Johnny Jackson's CDs are available from FirstEnergy Stadium and Border's in Wyomissing. You can contact Johnny at 610.373.8737 or visit www.jonitunes.com to view his gallery of art and music.