

Rock â??nâ?? roll and diamonds shaped the life of Arthur Indenbaum

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> WRITERâ??S NOTE: Arthur Indenbaum died on November 28, 2025, with his wife and daughter by his side. I was fortunate to have played bridge with him at SFâ??s Aquatic Park Senior Center. He loved to teach us what he knew, and we appreciated his great New York sense of humor.

By the time he was 12, Arthur Indenbaum had been playing the piano for four years and would soon take up the clarinet and the saxophone. Before long, he was the drummer in a junior high school band and quickly discovered the guitar. â??I was ready to take on any instrument,â?• he said.

He credits his musical versatility to four years of training under the Dalcroze method of using movement to learn music. His mother, who taught piano, was a devotee. He mastered the bass guitar and became a professional musician, but his life wasnâ??t all about rock â??nâ?? roll. At several points, he went to work in the family diamond business, handling millions of dollars in gems, often accompanied by armed bodyguards.



Arthur Indenbaum at home. (Photo by Colin Campbell)

He played in several bands over the decades, and participated in the lively music scenes in Greenwich Village, Marin County, and Antwerp, Belgium. He produced his own record and founded a successful sound company. He even tried his hand at writing and selling advertising jingles.

In his late 40s, he and his cousin Paul Indenbaum took over the business run by their fathers. Based in Manhattan, they bought millions of dollars of diamonds in Antwerp and sold them across the U.S.

Armed guards and diamonds

Dealing with such a valuable commodity required unusual precautions. â??Whenever we traveled and sold, we were never without bodyguards,â?• Indenbaum recalled.

Now 80, Indenbaum wears his favored denim overalls, sporting remnants of his fuzzy, youthful Afro. He still plays bass at home, accompanying his folk and blues favorites from his Spotify playlists. He talks with the continuous patter of a salesman, luring you in.

Indenbaum was born in Brooklyn, New York, and although he was admitted to the prestigious Brooklyn Technical High School, he wasnâ??t interested in his studies. â??I was interested in folk music I found in the clubs â?? CafÃ© Wha, The Gaslight, Gerdes Folk City, in Greenwich Village, where I spent a lot of time.â?•



Arthur Indenbaum, second from left, with bandmates from â??Shake Rattle and Rollâ?• in the â??80s. (Photo courtesy of Arthur Indenbaum)

He attended Kansas City University, but music not academics, remained his focus. â??The first semester at KC, I went to folk clubs most nights, and by my second semester I was in folk clubs, day and night. So, I called my parents and told them I wasnâ??t passing anything.â?• His folks reacted to the news by ordering him home and sending him to a psychiatrist.

Indenbaumâ??s father put his son to work as a sorter, evaluating diamonds based on size, color, clarity, and cut. â??I did sorting for a year or so, but found it boring, so I quit my fatherâ??s business,â?• he said.

Deciding that education was important after all, he went to night school to earn grades good enough for admission to Queens College, where he majored in philosophy and music.

Weed and folk music

â??I was smoking weed, playing folk music on the guitar, and when my parents moved to Manhattan, I switched to Hunter College,â?• he said, â??and thatâ??s when I joined the band Cryde to play bass guitar.â?•

That was the end of college and the beginning of Indenbaumâ??s life as a bass guitarist.

The bass guitar, he said, â??is a supportive instrument. Everything is built on it; it supports the rhythm and tempo of the drums (percussion), the vocal melody, and the instrumental melody. Thereâ??s a simplicity in it and yet a strength.â?• And it fits his hands better than the acoustic guitar, he said.

Cryde became the opening band for The Young Rascals for high school gigs. â??The Rascals wanted the worst band they could find to open for them so they would sound even better than they did, and they were good,â?• Indenbaum said.



Arthur Indenbaum and a prized guitar. (Photo by Colin Campbell)

During a Southern tour suggested by Crydeâ??s drummer, they attracted attention but not the kind they hoped for. â??Two Jews and two Italians driving through the South in the â??60s was a recipe for disaster,â?• Indenbaum said. â??We were stopped, more than once, and put in jail overnight for going 26 in a 25-hour zone.â?•

The band worked hard, but struggling financially, they broke up after two years. Indenbaum was 24, and his father insisted he stop playing rock â??nâ?? roll and work again in the diamond business, this time in Antwerp. While there, Indenbaum learned the skill of diamond cutting.

He mastered it quickly, but again, found the â??assembly-line job boring.â?• What he didnâ??t find boring was the art and music scene in Antwerp. He signed on with the band â??Liveâ?• a year after they found success in Paris. The band played improvisational rock â??nâ?? roll and composed melodies in the style of the Grateful Dead.

He shared a house with band members, ducking authorities because his work papers had expired. Live lasted two years, at which point Indenbaum and a girlfriend moved to Inverness, in Marin County, to take over her brotherâ??s rental.

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The music scene in Marin in the 1970s was ripe with opportunity. Indenbaum taught bass guitar at the Family Light Music School in Sausalito, where he met many other musicians. â??I got a lot of gigs through those musicians, and I became your basic journeyman bass player, playing with any band that needed me,â?• he said.

Love comes calling

After splitting with his girlfriend, Indenbaum found another love â?? this time in his living room. A friend brought home â??three beautiful womenâ?• from a consciousness-raising group. â??I fell hard for Elisa Skarveland from Norway,â?• he said. Six months later, when Indenbaum turned 30, the couple married and remain together through 50 years of marriage.

At 36, to supplement his income, Indenbaum started a sound company, Arthurâ??s PA. â??I knew I had a good ear for sound, so I bought equipment, hired a kid, and spread the word among my musician friends,â?• he said. â??As a bass player, I made $40 or $50 a night, but as a sound man I could pull in $300, minus expenses.â?• Indenbaum ran the company for 11 years until it became harder to â??hump around heavier and more equipment.â?•

Indenbaum self-produced an album, â??Arthur/Joy,â?• in 1981. â??It took three years to complete,â?• he said. â??I pressed 500 albums, threw a big party, sold about 100 ($5 each) and gave away the same. Over the years, Iâ??ve sold and given away most of the rest.â?•

In 1985, Indenbaum and a fellow musician from Chicago who had success writing jingles formed a jingle company. â??Even though we won awards, my mistake was locating the company in West Marin,â?• he said. â??In those days, without the internet, we lost out not being near the big advertising agencies in San Francisco.â?•

By 1987, Indenbaum had a young daughter, and he realized it was time to build a more substantial income. He sold his sound company, gave away his recording studio to his partner, and moved his family to New York.

Indenbaum found himself selling diamonds for his father and uncle, â??making good money, but it wasnâ??t really working out.â?• Three years later, his cousin Paul decided to come back into the diamond business, and the two men â??clicked.â?• Their parents dispatched the pair to Antwerp to buy diamonds. â??We went and spent $2 million,â?• Indenbaum said. â??Thatâ??s normal. Youâ??d go there for a week and spend between $1.5 million and $3 million.â?•



Arthur Indenbaum, second from right, playing with the Tom McNally band in 1977. (Photo courtesy of Arthur Indenbaum)

The goods were shipped back, and when the father and uncle looked at the diamonds, they knew their sons had an eye for success in the diamond business. Ready to retire, they sold the business to the younger men.

Indenbaum remembers his bodyguards fondly. â??I came to the business from being a California hippie,â?• he said. â??My bodyguards were all serious Republicans; we had lots of fun disagreeing on

everything political. I became good friends with all of them.â?•



Arthur Indenbaumâ??s musical career began when he was just 8 years old. (Photo courtesy of Arthur Indenbaum)

One bodyguard was a 6-foot-7-inch retired Atlanta cop â??who drove a big white caddy with a license plate that said, â??Living Large.â??â?• Another was a retired New York City cop.

Although robbers and scammers beset diamond dealers in the movies, Indenbaum never dealt with violence. â??In 17 years as partners, me and my cousin got burned three times out of thousands of

sales.â?•

Indenbaum was happy in his post-rock â??nâ?? roll career. â??I loved to shmooze with my uncleâ??s customers in Philadelphia,â?• he said, but by the time he was in his late 60s he was ready to retire.

He sold the family home in New Rochelle in Westchester County, New York, and moved back to California in 2012. â??By then, prices were too high to buy in West Marin, so we found a rental we love in the Marina in San Francisco.â?•

Moving to San Francisco â??saved my life,â?• said Indenbaum, who had a heart attack in 2020, a stroke in 2023, and a recent bout of atrial fibrillation. â??If I had lived in West Marin, I would have died because it was too far to reach Marin General in time.â?•

Indenbaum celebrates his luck, focuses on healing, strums his bass, plays gin rummy with his wife, and plays bridge at The Aquatic Park Senior Center. Although he never became a big star, he made a go of the music business for many years and seems happy that he followed his dream.

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