

Mann, We'll Miss You: The jazz community mourns the loss of one of its greats



In the RI jazz community, connections run deep, so with a loss comes profound sorrow. Recently, the jazz community lost one of its most cherished souls, Debra Mann, and the outpouring of both grief and love toward her from across the state has been inspiring to see.

Debra Mann graduated from Berklee College of Music in Boston where she studied jazz and classical piano and voice with such incredible musicians as Charlie Banacos, Hall Crook and Jeannie LoVetri. She performed around New England for many years as a soloist and as part of many different ensembles, playing jazz clubs, festivals and concert halls, including Symphony Hall with the Boston Pops. Throughout her career, she played with local icons such as Greg Abate, Dave Zinno, Dino Govoni, Jay Azzolina, John Lockwood, Marty Richards, Marty Ballou, Dan Moretti, Ed Tomassi, Bob Gullotti and John Allmark, among countless others. She eventually established a set trio, which grew into a quintet that became her main performing group. Besides performing, she was a revered educator, teaching both privately and as a faculty member at Brown University and Wheaton College. She was also a member of The Jazz Education Network and The Providence Musicians Union, and recorded for New Bedford's Whaling City Sound.

I reached out to a friend and long-time collaborator of hers, bass player Dave Zinno, to ask him for some insight into who she was.

As we began talking about Debra, the first thing Zinno said to me was that she was "filled with good will." He said that more than any musician he has met, she was "super supportive of live music ... she would turn up everywhere, across genres. Didn't matter if it was a folk artist or whatever, her and her husband would come out and support everything. And she always had something good to say."

Dave went on to tell me about her exquisite ability and her influences, her love for the American songbook, Brazilian music and the music of Antonio Carlos Jobim. Her top influence, however, was Joni Mitchell, and Dave said that for years she wanted to do a project that would honor Joni's music. She

arranged and performed many of Joni's tunes for several concerts and they became Debra's phenomenal final album, *Full Circle: The Music Of Joni Mitchell*, which was released last year through Whaling City Sound.

Listening to this gorgeous album, you can hear not only the reverence Debra felt for Joni's music, but how Debra took up that spirit and imbued each song with her own unique essence. And as Dave put it to me, because Joni was the spark that began Debra's musical journey, it's "poetic that it came out when it did, the whole notion of 'Full Circle' is really beautiful."

The beauty of musicians is that although we eventually will lose them, we still have their recordings, their songs and the stories they leave behind with those they shared the bandstand with; including the many stories Dave shared with me, his voice filled with the same joy she brought into so many lives.

To end, here are some of Debra's own words from her song "Lessons of the Heart" off her album, *Home*:
"Now it's time to say goodbye/And greet the dawn with joy not mournful sighs/My heart wants to sing of gladness not of bitterness or sadness/My heart wants to sing a song of loveliness not lonely madness...I'll make a brand new start/Learning once again the lessons of the heart."

To listen to Debra's albums, purchase music, and learn more about her, visit debramann.com.

Happening Around Town:

The John Allmark Jazz Orchestra; *first Monday monthly @ The Met (Pawtucket)*

Groove Merchants; *Mondays @ Fifth Element (Newport)*

Jazz Jam; *Tuesdays @ Ten Rocks (Pawtucket)*

Leland Baker Quartet; *Wednesdays @ Acacia Club (Providence)*

Jazz At The Parlour; *Sundays (jam held every third Sunday) @ The Parlour (Providence)*

Modern Sound Series; *last Sunday monthly @ Tea In Sahara (Providence)*

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Ben Shaw is a local composer, performer, and writer. Find him at benjaminshawmusic.com.