

Jazz Insights: Jean O'Donnell



A list of great musicians coming out of Woonsocket must include Jean (McKenna) O'Donnell. As the sister to the late fabulous internationally acclaimed pianist Dave McKenna, who had captured the jazz world and more, she had graciously accepted being a few paces in back of her gifted brother without any fanfare.

Their mother was a violinist and dad, Bill, was a drummer. As a child, Jean began performing as a singer soloist with church groups, choral groups and even jazz groups and orchestras. She moved to Boston and recorded commercials, while singing at the Hotel Bostonian. When making a demo recording with her brother Dave, she was approached with an offer to go to New York. Instead, she taught high school English and worked weekends with local bands.

John Chan's Chinese Restaurant opened a Music Room in downtown Woonsocket and invited Jean, who was part of a group called "The Deacons," to help perform in their inaugural event. She accepted and

Jean stills sings at Chan's.

Over the years she has performed there and other locations with a long list of giant musicians that includes her brother Dave, trumpeter Bobby Hackett, clarinetist Dick Johnson, bassist Marshall Wood and the gifted pianist Mike Renzi.

Renzi arranged her CD *Full Circle*, which highlights her skills as a professional singer. Her voice treats listeners to perfect pitch and an array of selections from the American Songbook that few can deliver.

Fans can often catch Jean at the GreenVale Vineyards in Portsmouth or at Chan's.