

# Thank You, George Wein: What his legacy means to the life of a local jazz musician

My first few years at the Newport Jazz and Folk Festivals were spent standing behind a cart, selling ice cold drinks to festival attendees. I'd chase the shade with my umbrella, while listening to legends and newcomers play, and daydream about what it must look like from up there on the historic stage. As I'd count change and try to get through the long lines of people waiting to buy water or soda between sets, occasionally I'd look up and see a golf cart moving slowly down the path with a little sign on the windshield that read "The Lean Green Wein Machine."

## Newport Jazz Festival Founder...



George Wein, art by Charlie Hall

All day I would see George Wein in the passenger seat, riding back and forth trying to catch as much of each performance as he could, going to meet with someone or doing the work that needed to be done to keep the festivals operating. Every so often he'd stop near where I stood so he could sit with the folks and take in the music. I'd watch him smile and bob his head in time, enjoying the fruits of his long, often arduous journey to secure these festivals' rightful distinctions as the first and most important in American music history.

So much has been said about his life already. In his early days, he was a determined self-starter, a visionary who changed what musical festivals could be. Later, he became a courageous ally, who sought to use his platform to advance racial justice and equity in an industry with a poor record of inequality and outright abuse. The tributes all talk of his casual but electric personality, how admired he was by those who knew him, and how much love he had for the music he helped foster in the world.

I never got to meet Mr. Wein, which may have been good for both our sakes. I'm sure I would have stumbled over my words as I delayed his golf cart, trying to tell him how important his festivals are to me. Both the Jazz and Folk Festivals provided me with enough inspiration to keep the wheels on my dream greased for another year. I am so glad that he decided to take a chance on starting these festivals in a little seaside town down the road from where I grew up. Without his legacy I probably wouldn't be trying to chase mine.

I like to think that one day as he drove by my cart, he looked and saw me — a teenager standing in awe at the majesty of the moment unfolding, a young musician his mouth agape in wonder at the music and revelry surrounding him. George might've smiled to himself knowing that he was reshaping yet another person's life as he sputtered off in "The Lean Green Wein Machine".

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