

The Roots Report: History Lesson: Celebrating 30 years of music

Okee dokee folks... I can't believe it's been 30 years. If it wasn't for what happened 30 years ago I wouldn't be writing for *Motif*, I never would have started the Providence Folk Festival or Hear In Rhode Island, and the Rhode Island Songwriters Association would not be as we know it today.

Back in the mid '80s I was playing music around RI and Massachusetts. I was mostly performing in bars, but I did start to gig at a new place called AS220. I wasn't very happy playing music solo and wanted to form a duo. I tried several times, but each one crashed and burned on the runway. I was about ready to give up on music. In 1989 I connected with Mary Ann Rossoni. The musical chemistry was immediate and we began the Fuzek-Rossoni duo — rehearsing, writing music, playing shows and recording. We rode the folk wave of the early '90s, garnered a lot of attention and even won a few awards. We were constantly performing at some of the best folk rooms around the Northeast and East Coast as well as with some of the notable names in the folk world. After seven years it took its toll and I burned out, so Fuzek-Rossoni took a hiatus. I barely played music for years. I did, however, stay involved in music behind the scenes.

During a period of writer's block I was dealing with while I was still with Fuzek-Rossoni, Mary Ann gave me a flyer she'd found about a fledgling songwriter's group called The Rhode Island Songwriters Association. I went to a meeting of the new group and found that it was just a few people who discussed songwriting. I use a borrowed quote, "my two cents turned into five dollars" when I tell the story of how I wound up running the organization. I offered suggestions to the founder, Mary Wheelan, and she handed me a folder of what she had and said, "Okay, you can do it." The first thing I did was design a logo and call the group RISA for short. We started having showcases and workshops. From that I started The Hear In Rhode Island (HIRI) Festival (1994-2001), the impetus to work with the Newport Folk Festival where I produced and ran a songwriter stage for nine years that featured local and regional performers. Over the years this turned into work with other festivals, producing CDs, starting a few other music series in RI and MA, founding The Providence Folk Festival, writing for *Motif*, serving on the board of the Folk Alliance and Stone Soup Coffeehouse, as well as so many other things that I cannot remember anymore. The one thing I WAS NOT doing was PLAYING music. There was a period when I did not even touch a guitar for about a year.

While I was in my personal music limbo, Mary Ann kept writing, recording and performing as a solo. She was also very involved with RISA and was the president for a period as well. She wrote for a couple of magazines, including *Motif*, ran many music events such as the Goddess Show, and she also served as a board member of Stone Soup and got involved with the RI Music Hall of Fame.

Eventually I started writing, recording and performing again. Over the years Mary Ann and I have reunited from time to time and done some writing, recording and even played a few shows. It's been 30 years since Fuzek-Rossoni's very first performance and we will be celebrating this with a special reunion concert on November 16 at The Blackstone River Theatre in Cumberland. Joining Mary Ann and me for this show will be our good friend Ed McGuirl who will add some guitar, mandolin, bass, dobro and whatever else he decides to bring with him to play that night. Violinist and vocalist Amy Bedard will join Fuzek-Rossoni as well as accompany Dan Lilley who will be opening up the night with a set of his music. In addition to all this, Mary Ann Rossoni will be exhibiting some of her artwork at Blackstone River Theatre and there will be a reception for this work from 6-7pm on the 16th. We hope that some of the old Fuzek-Rossoni fans will come out for this and maybe we can even win over some new ones. Mary Ann and I have put together an anthology CD that will be available at the show. I am forever grateful for the music and Mary Ann — a connection that led to so much. For more, "March On" over to riverfolk.org

Oh, wait, here's another one: If it wasn't for Fuzek-Rossoni, I would never have started my band Forever Young. Coincidentally, Forever Young has a show at the Pump House on Saturday, November 2. We will be performing a rare, intimate, all acoustic show of Neil Young's music. For more about this, "Peace Trail" to pumphousemusicworks.com

Speaking of the Rhode Island Songwriters Association they will be holding their monthly Songwriters In The Round show at AS220 on Wednesday, November 13 from 7 - 8:15pm. This edition features host Jim Tata along with Eben Salter, Beth DeSombre and CiCi Eberle all presenting songs written based on the audience selected theme of "Maybe Later" as well as a couple of their other originals. Be a part of this month's audience, and not only do you get to enjoy the music, you help choose the theme for next month's songwriters! The new bar and restaurant at AS220 are open for business! For more about RISA and the series, inspire over to risongwriters.com

WRIU Folk DJ Russ Smith and his wife Joan are hosting a free concert with guitar virtuoso Claude Bourbon at the Tiverton Public Library on Saturday, November 9 at 7pm. Bourbon is a master of finger-style Spanish blues and it has been a couple of years since he shared his talents with a RI audience. If you are a fan of spectacular playing or maybe just a little guitar curious you should check it out. Free is always good, but this should be amazing! For more, get the pluck over to claudbourbon.org

"Elvis is Everywhere!" That is a song by Mojo Nixon and it kinda sorta of applies here. Well, not really, but Elvis is in Harrisville. Okay, not the real Elvis, but the next best thing, Robert Black as Elvis! His authentic portrayal and exciting interpretation of Elvis Presley, has made him one of the most popular tribute artists around. Check out his show on November 2. Black's band consists of RI musical luminaries such as Johnny Cote, Steve Bigelow, Lisa Marie and Neal Vitullo. The Assembly Theater is located at 26 East Ave in Harrisville and is a wonderful 400-seat room that has been hosting some great shows as of late. If you are a Northern Rhode Islander or don't mind a quick drive into rural RI, then you should definitely check out their line-up of shows! For more, conjure over to

facebook.com/TheAssemblyTheater

Sorry about tooting my own horn so much this time around, but I am very excited about the Fuzek-Rossoni show, so bring on the cheese. Anyway, that's it for now. Thanks for reading. JohnFuzek.com