



LYNNE MUELLER

A JAZZ ADVOCATE'S LEGACY
BY SUZANNE LORGE

Make no mistake—though she works behind the scenes, Lynne Mueller is and has been a powerhouse when it comes to jazz. Over the course of three decades, she's produced scores of concerts and festivals, established scholarships, curated historic archives and developed educational programs for up-and-coming musicians. During these years, she dedicated herself to creating new opportunities for audiences and musicians alike, while also working to preserve jazz history. Today, as an active leader on the New Jersey arts scene, she stands out as one of the region's most influential advocates for jazz, a role she never expected to play.

Mueller's first career actually had little to do with music. Armed with a degree in biology, she spent more than 30 years at Colgate-Palmolive, where she built an impressive career in research and development. She worked as a biologist and formulation chemist before becoming the company's first female section head in R&D; later, she managed global fragrance projects for the household and laundry products division. The organizational and leadership skills she developed there as a scientist, however, would later prove invaluable to her work in music. "I had an opportunity then to take the skills that I had learned in my corporate job into a passion for something that I loved," Mueller recalls. "That became jazz."

Jazz wasn't her first passion. Before turning to music, she had devoted years to figure skating, eventually serving as president of New Jersey's Union County Figure Skating Club. But after discovering jazz radio, volunteering at Newark's WBGO, her interests shifted permanently. Through the station, she met members of the Duke Ellington Society and soon found herself producing concerts for them (serving for a term as DES president) and continued to work full-time at Colgate-Palmolive. It was years later, upon retirement, Mueller could at last fully indulge her passion for jazz. "You should never retire unless you've got something planned to go into," she advises.

Around this time, Mueller discovered Saint Peter's

Church in Manhattan, which was just beginning to build out its renowned Jazz Ministry. Invited to participate in its strategic planning, she eventually came to champion its many jazz programs. From 2004-2016, she was instrumental in launching the popular Jazz on the Plaza concert series, the First Tuesdays educational business seminars for musicians (in partnership with Chamber Music America) and several popular festivals, including the All Nite Soul Jazz Festival, Prez Fest and Women in Jazz Festival. As she developed these programs, Mueller started to lean into documenting the work of the artists she was presenting. Case in point when legendary pianist Randy Weston was guest of honor at Saint Peter's, she first interviewed him, then worked with Rutgers University's Institute of Jazz Studies to assemble photographs, articles and archival materials to give audiences a richer understanding of his musical legacy. This presentation was an early expression of a philosophy that continues to guide her work today: preserving jazz means telling the stories behind the music.

That philosophy found perhaps its most meaningful expression through her relationship with trumpeter-flugelhornist Art Farmer. Mueller first admired Farmer as a fan after attending one of his performances at William Paterson University in the late '80s. Over time, she became not only a close friend but also his manager during the final years of his life, and since Farmer's death in 1999, she has remained one of the principal stewards of his legacy. In 2019, she donated a significant portion of Farmer's music, recordings, letters and memorabilia to William Paterson University's Living Jazz Archives. At the same time, she established the Art Farmer Jazz Master Scholarship through a \$28,000 gift to support future jazz students. For Mueller, such actions are essential in furthering jazz as an art form.

"Living jazz archives are really important," she said in an interview with the *William Paterson University News* at the time, noting that the university's collection is distinctive because it preserves the work of individual artists while making their music and personal papers available to students. She hopes young musicians will not only study Farmer's recordings and compositions but also gain insight into what it meant to build a life in jazz. Recalling Farmer's appearance in the Academy Award-nominated documentary, *A Great Day in Harlem*, Mueller then quoted one of his more poignant observations: "Musicians are not gone, [they] live on in the next generation of musicians."

Today, much of Mueller's energy is devoted to another legacy project—building a thriving jazz

community in her hometown of Metuchen, NJ (less than 30 miles from midtown Manhattan). As Director of Metuchen Jazz and a founding member of Friends of Metuchen Arts, she has helped transform the borough into an important regional spot for live jazz. Since 2017 she has overseen an ambitious calendar that includes festivals, concert series, jazz brunches, educational programs and performances throughout the year. But her vision extends well beyond presenting concerts. "We are working hard to put Metuchen Jazz on the map as a destination," she says.

That vision comes to life each year during the Middlesex County Jazz Festival, the result of a partnership between Metuchen Jazz and neighboring communities. The festival spans four towns and presents internationally recognized artists alongside local performers. In Metuchen, the event begins with student dancers and high school jazz ensembles before segueing into professional groups and nationally-acclaimed headliners such as the Mingus Big Band. The festival's wide-ranging program serves multiple purposes, offering top-tier music to the community while providing up-and-coming young musicians with performing opportunities alongside established professionals.

The annual Middlesex County Jazz Festival (Sep. 23-26) is the highlight of the Metuchen Jazz program each year. Even so, Mueller is equally passionate about regularly scheduled performances and ongoing jazz education during non-festival months, as Metuchen Jazz boasts a full roster of local youth performances and monthly concerts with visiting artists. Metuchen Jazz will also soon host listening parties where participants can share their love of classic recordings and discuss the music in depth.

For many, decades spent promoting jazz would be enough. Yet Mueller still believes there is more to do—namely, cultivating the next generation of jazz listeners. This powerhouse wants to ensure that the spark that first drew her to jazz as a WBGO volunteer—and changed the course of her life—is kindled in others. In that sense, Art Farmer's observation rings true not only for musicians but for jazz advocates as well: they live on through their legacy.

For more info visit friendsofmetuchenarts.org. The fourth annual Middlesex County Jazz Festival (featuring Mingus Big Band, Dave Schumacher & Cubey, Eli Yamin's Jazz & Blues Band, Camille Thurman with the Darrell Green Quartet, Lance Bryant, et al.) is Sep. 23-26. See 100 Miles Out.

LEST WE FORGET



JEREMY STEIG

HOWLING FOR MORE FLUTE
BY JEFF CEBULSKI

Every September since 2018, flutist Cheryl Pyle has gathered fellow flute players for the Howling for Jeremy Steig Solo Flute Festival, held at the Lower East Side's 6BC Botanical Garden. The celebration of Steig's birthday (Sep. 23, 1942) and remembrance of his unique talent features solos, improvisations and readings from *Get Me Out of Here*, Steig's collection of musings and drawings. The idea for the festival came after Steig's passing one decade ago. Pyle had been attracted to his adventurous style in the '70s, when she was studying music at UC Berkeley. "Jeremy was such a free player, incorporating blues and straight-ahead ideas, [but] he

sounded new, embracing rock and experimental ideas," she says. "His freedom and playful experiments were stunning, musical adventures."

That the Greenwich Village-born Steig had the opportunity for a long musical career was a minor miracle, the result of determination and imagination. The son of the famous cartoonist and illustrator William Steig (yes, the author of *Shrek*), he took up the flute at 11 and quickly developed a mastery of the instrument. But a 1961 motorbike accident in Bermuda nearly derailed his career, leaving the left half of his face paralyzed. To hold air in when he tried to play, he created a cardboard-and-tape mouthpiece that fit under his lips, allowing him to return to performance. His adventurous style caught the attention of legendary Columbia Records producer John Hammond, who produced Steig's first album as a leader, *Flute Fever* (Columbia, 1963). As the jazz fusion era evolved, the flute player formed a band that supported folk singers Tim Hardin and Tom Rush, which ultimately became the Satyrs. His second album, *Jeremy and the Satyrs* (Reprise, 1968), is in the running as one of the first-ever jazz-rock albums (*Out of Sight*

and *Sound* by The Free Spirits—with Larry Coryell, Jim Pepper and Bob Moses—precedes it by a year). The Satyrs had a two-and-a-half-month residency in the West Village at the Dom on St. Mark's Place, where they played six nights a week. The group's lineup included the formidable bassist Eddie Gomez, a member of Bill Evans' trio (with drummer Marty Morell), an association that led to Steig and the Evans trio's standards-laden album, *What's New* (Verve, 1969). Gomez would remain Steig's near-constant musical partner for over 40 years.

The Satyrs became big enough to open for Cream at Fillmore West and Winterland before they broke up. Steig would go on to play on folk singer Richie Havens' second and third albums, but he didn't get radio programmers' attention until his *Wayfaring Stranger* (Blue Note, 1970), which had a bluesy swing leavened by his wandering, sharply-rendered improvisations. For a time, Steig became a darling of the rock elite. He would form a high-voltage new band (with keyboardist Jan Hammer, bassist Gene Perla and drummer-

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percussionist Don Alias), which recorded two albums and led off festivals in front of Jimi Hendrix and Elton John. “Jeremy was a work,” says Perla. “He was straight ahead and always played his ass off!” According to Perla, Hendrix heard their album *Energy*—recorded in 1970 with Eddie Kramer at Hendrix’ Electric Lady Studios—and wanted to jam with them once he returned from London; alas, that never came to be, as Hendrix passed away in September of that year.

Steig spent some time in Europe, concentrating on free jazz. However, his album *Firefly* (CTI, 1977) was viewed by fans there as a corporate-produced cop-out. “They thought I had sold out,” Steig said in an interview with this publication in 2004. His popularity then began to fade. “That was the start of the gigs not happening much anymore,” he continued. Pyle, who worked at Tower Records in NYC’s West Village, remembers, “Jeremy said he would market a new album as ‘the new one by the half-dead flutist,’ so more people would buy it. I always dug his dry sense of humor.” Steig would press on, continuing his fruitful collaborations with Gomez, particularly in a series of duets, from the live *Outlaws* (Enja, 1976), *Music For Flute & Double-Bass* (CMP, 1978) and *Rain Forest* (CMP, 1980), to *Lend Me Your Ears* (CMP, 1978) with Gomez and drummer Joe Chambers.

Another accident, however, curbed the flutist: in 1982, Steig was bicycling when he was hit by a car, which ran a red light, and subsequently suffered a broken neck. He was sidelined for six months and disappeared from the scene, working privately on his “flute band” projects, where he overdubbed a variety of flute parts. Steig re-emerged as a leader in 1992 on *Jigsaw* (Triloka). His productivity, though, hid his own instabilities, including the shock of 9/11. He appeared on two albums led by Gomez in 2002 and 2003, but it wasn’t until he married his wife Asako in 2003 that Steig’s life seemed to stabilize, including one fine album, *Improvised* (Steig Music, 2004), which paired his flute with guitarist Vic Juris.

Steig would perform regularly in the early aughts at the West Village Cornelia Street Café—with bassists Gomez, Cameron Brown and others. He would spend his last half-dozen years in relative anonymity, after moving with his wife to Yokohama, where he created art, wrote his musings, composed music for short animated films, and performed the occasional concert. Steig passed away due to cancer on April 13, 2016, even though news of his death was not widely circulated until almost two months after the fact.

The flutist Robert Dick, who has appeared at five of Pyle’s Howling for Jeremy Steig Solo Flute Festivals, affirms, “I play in the Howling to honor Jeremy’s inner child. I dig the wildness and freedom in his playing. He didn’t self-edit.” In an uncanny irony, Steig’s 1970 recording of “Howlin’ for Judy” (originally released on his *Legwork*, and from which the Howling Festival gets its name) was prominently sampled by the Beastie Boys on their 1994 hit “Sure Shot”. Steig noted that he made more money from its residuals than he made throughout his entire career.

For more info visit jeremysteig.info. The annual Howling for Jeremy Steig Solo Flute Festival/Jeremy Steig birthday tribute is at 6BC Botanical Garden Sep. 20 (presented by Cheryl Pyle’s Beyond Flute Group and featuring Pyle, Samantha Kochis, Sylvain Leroux, Ras Moshe Burnett, Chip Shelton and others). See Calendar.

Recommended Listening:

- Jeremy Steig—*Flute Fever* (Columbia, 1963)
- Jeremy Steig—*Wayfaring Stranger* (Blue Note, 1970)
- Jeremy Steig—*Legwork* (Solid State, 1970)
- Jeremy Steig/Eddie Gomez—*Outlaws* (Enja, 1976)
- Jeremy Steig, Eddie Gomez, Joe Chambers—*Lend Me Your Ears* (CMP, 1978)
- Jeremy Steig Quartet—*Flute on the Edge* (Steig Music, 2005)

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NYCJR: I should mention that you also dance while you play, and you did *Dancing with the Stars* in Sweden. How did you do on the show?

CARLING: It was mostly celebrities on that show. But one year it was raining all day, every day, and nobody went out the whole summer. And I had a gig in Stockholm’s Central Park. And suddenly, when my show started the sun came out, the doors opened and the whole city saw me. The next year I did an even bigger show with my New Orleans group, playing songs like “Bourbon Street Parade”. And that’s when they called me and said I should be on *Dancing with the Stars*. I had to learn different styles—this was ballroom dancing, and I tap dance and do the Lindy Hop. Ballroom dancing is much more stiff, totally different. The competition was difficult, but I made it to third place.

NYCJR: I know you played both with the WDR Big Band in Germany and also with the Count Basie Orchestra, under Scotty Barnhart.

CARLING: That was fantastic. I played with the Basie Orchestra in London, and then two shows in Sweden, where it was winter, snowing and freezing. Then we went to Germany and everywhere. The audiences, they just love the Basie band so much. There was a lot of pride from the Europeans that I was one of them and in that band. And the musicians in that band are SO good. It was the time of my life, and a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

NYCJR: In 2018 you relocated to California. What led to that?

CARLING: Two things. I was invited to do a tour with Postmodern Jukebox [a rotating musical collective that plays contemporary music in the style of the ’20s] in America, and that was really a dream that I wanted to do. They play in every city, and I wanted to see every city. And I also wanted to be a part of the Postmodern Jukebox world, and work with them in Europe. My husband found a job in America, in San Francisco, and so we moved there.

NYCJR: And then came COVID-19.

CARLING: I was in California, and we couldn’t travel. We couldn’t even leave the house. So, I started a jazz band with my neighbors, and we started to livestream. It was the best thing, working with young musicians from all over the world. We started with “Tin Roof Blues”, by the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, and we explored the Louis Armstrong Hot Fives and the music of Fletcher Henderson, on to Kansas City with Bennie Moten, and then Chicago jazz.

NYCJR: Do you like the caliber of the jazz musicians you find in America?

CARLING: Very, very good. In Europe we fell in love with jazz through records, and we see it as like the classical music of the 20th century. It’s more free in America. You can mix and match as you like.

NYCJR: And what do you have coming up?

CARLING: I’m doing a Louis Armstrong record, a tribute with the big band, strings and guests, and all of Satchmo’s highlights, from “Cornet Chop Suey” to “La Vie En Rose” and beyond. And then a tour. In September I play at The Loft at City Winery in New York and Boston’s City Winery. I will also play Keystone Korner in Baltimore, and Centenary University in Hackettstown, NJ [on Aug. 30, Carling also plays the Nyack Jazz Festival in Nyack, NY].

NYCJR: I was wondering if you’ve ever played NYC’s Gotham Jazz Festival, which is all about ’20s and ’30s jazz music. It just seems made for you.

CARLING: Oh, it’s definitely made for me! I haven’t been yet, but one day. I was invited, but right then I couldn’t go because of my visa status. My residency in NYC has always been Birdland, the jazz club that’s my favorite place to play.

NYCJR: Watching you, I’m reminded that Louis Armstrong and Count Basie were great musicians, but they were also entertainers.

CARLING: When people go out on a Friday or Saturday night, it’s a special time and the energy has to be there. But if they go out on a Monday, it’s different. You can slow it down, play these songs and talk about the music. If it’s a Friday night, though, you have to give blood, sweat and tears!

For more info visit gunhildcarling.net. Carling is at The Loft at City Winery Sep. 16. She is also at Sellersville Theater (Sellersville, PA) Sep. 10 and Centenary Stage Company (Hackettstown, NJ) Sep. 12. See Calendar and 100 Miles Out.

Recommended Listening:

- Gunhild Carling Band—*I Lost My Heart in Dixieland* (Phontastic, 1984)
- Gunhild Carling and Her Swing Band—*That’s My Desire* (Heptown, 2002)
- Carling Family—*Hot Jazz* (Heptown, 2008)
- Gunhild Carling & Carling Big Band—*Variete* (Carling, 2012-13)
- Gunhild Carling—*Good Evening Cats!* (Jazz Art, 2022)
- Gunhild Carling—*Jazz is My Lifestyle* (Jazz Art, 2024)



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