



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-

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 33)