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EASTERN PLATEAU

Connections

A Social Publication for the Residents of
Meadowbrook, Regatta View, Oak Ridge and Interlaken



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Jeanne O'Connor,
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YOUR STORIES, YOUR PHOTOS, YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD



The New Standard, clockwise from left: pianist Scott Bassinson; bassist Tony Markellis; guitarist/singer Bob Warren; drummer/singer Sam Zucchini; Jeanne; singer Mallory Donnelly. Photo by Joseph Deuel

Caffe Lena



Mouzon House. Keyboardist, Scott Bassinson; bassist, Pete Toigo. Photo credit: John Oakley.

Jeanne O'Connor

Singer, Vocal Coach, Performer

What inspired you to be a musician / singer?

Well, I grew up on Long Island in a music-loving family. My dad loved to sing throughout his life, and my folks played a lot of Sinatra records, among others. Several of my brothers and sisters (we were 7 kids in all) are still excellent amateur musicians. And of course the music I grew up with was so very important and inspiring – great artists like Joni Mitchell, Carole King, Laura Nyro, Jackson Browne,

Linda Ronstadt, the Beatles, the Band – who didn't dream of being a singer or a musician?

Tell us about your education and career path leading up to where you are now.

I always had a voice, and sang in choruses, school musicals, and with friends in folk groups. I also studied some classical piano. In addition, I was interested in journalism and often wrote for school publications.

I attended Brown University, where I studied literature and history and took some music courses.

There, I began singing in a professional rock/jazz/originals band that toured the New England region. I continued to write for publications at Brown and in the greater Providence area.

At some point in my 20s I simply fell in love with jazz and began to sing with jazz ensembles. I moved to NYC and began working as both a professional freelance writer and a singer, but eventually focused primarily

on music. During my career I have studied classical voice and jazz/pop technique privately with several voice teachers, as well as basic jazz piano. Eventually I began to teach and coach voice.

What is unique about your music projects that sets you apart from the rest?

I think it's the range of musical experience that I've enjoyed. I've sung with swing-oriented big bands, including Peter Duchin Orchestras and Vince Giordano's Nighthawks. I am a founding member of String of Pearls, a female jazz vocal trio. I've done rock and pop gigs and studio projects. Lately I've started a band called "Jeanne O'Connor and the New Standard" with some of the best players in the Capital Region. It's allowed me to return to the music of my youth! We re-interpret the songs of great artists like Burt Bachrach, Joni Mitchell, and Carole King with really inventive grooves -- and I get to write fun 4-part harmonies.

As a voice teacher and coach, I help my students develop sound vocal technique -- breath support and control, tone placement and resonance, pitch, and range extension. Because of my own background, I can help students with a lot of different styles of singing -- show music, pop and R&B songs, jazz standards, and some classical material. I also teach sight-singing and basic music theory.

What are some of your favorite songs to sing?

Oh, the list is so long! I really favor the songs of Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart -- "I Didn't Know What Time it Was," "My Funny Valentine," and "Isn't It Romantic." On my solo CD, I did some other American Songbook gems like "I'll Know" from Guys and Dolls, and "All the Things You Are." With the New Standard, I get to sing great songs like "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow," "Do You Know the Way To San Jose?," "Crazy Love," and "Ain't No Mountain High Enough." And when I sing in a duo

with keyboardist Azzaam Hameed, we do some cool Latin tunes like "Sway" as well as R&B gems like "Betcha By Golly Wow" and Aretha Franklin's "Until You Come Back to Me."

Who are some of your favorite singers?

Sarah Vaughn, Ella Fitzgerald, Rosemary Clooney, Nancy Wilson, Donny Hathaway, Diane Reeves, Bonnie Raitt, James Taylor, Bobby McFerrin, Alison Krauss, Esperanza Spalding, Marvin Gaye, Jon Hendricks, Frank Sinatra, Stevie Wonder.

Favorite go-to albums?

Miles Davis' "Porgy and Bess" and "Milestones," Cannonball Adderly and Nancy Wilson's first album together, Joni Mitchell's "Court and Spark," Oscar Peterson's "West Side Story," Stevie Wonder's "Songs in the Key of Life," James Taylor's "Never Die Young." I never get tired of the songs on the Beatles' "Rubber Soul!" Lately I've been obsessing on the cast album from "Hamilton" -- brilliant. I love the music of saxophonist Michael Brecker and that of my late first husband, Don Grolnick, a phenomenal pianist and jazz composer.

Do you listen to music in the car? If so what do you like?

I do! I listen to the Sirius "Spectrum" channel for range of old and new rock/alternative music; also the "Real Jazz" and "Soul Town" stations. And now and then I'll tune into the Broadway channel to hear an older gem or something from an exciting new show. Otherwise I put my iTunes library on shuffle and see what comes up.

What are some of your most memorable gigs and why?

I've played at New York's Blue Note a couple of times -- totally thrilling. It was also great to play at the Kennedy Center with my vocal trio, String of Pearls, as part of their Women in Jazz Festival. I sang with Vince Giordano at the plaza at Lincoln Center as part of the Midsummer Night's Swing Festival. Twice, I played with a swing band at a birthday party at the Connecticut home of Jason Robards -- lots of Broadway luminaries there! I love playing at Caffé Lena here in Saratoga; the sound and atmosphere are so special. I really enjoyed playing with the Nat Phipps Trio at "A Place for Jazz," a lovely concert series in Schenectady.

Given your business expertise and the nature of what you do, what advice (whether general or specific) can you offer to your neighbors who may be interested in pursuing music for fun or professionally?

I would advise younger people who are still in school to get some grounding in reading music and music theory by playing an instrument -- piano and

guitar are great, and easiest to learn when you are young. Try to expose yourself to as many playing/singing situations with as many different musicians as possible! Learn to listen intensely to the music that you love and figure out the roles of the different instruments and how it all comes together. For singers young and old, it helps to study some basic voice technique with someone like me or one of my colleagues. There are also a number of wonderful choruses and singing groups in this area. I've sung frequently with the Battenkill Chorale in Cambridge -- it stretches different musical muscles than the ones you use on a jazz gig. Skidmore also has a great community chorus, and there are groups like the Racing City Chorus and Saratoga Soundtrack. You can get your feet wet as a performer by singing at one of the regular open mics in town, at Gaffney's or at Caffé Lena.

What else we should know about you and/or your business?

You can find out more and listen to audio clips on my website, www.jeanneoconnor.com.

If you would like to:

- take voice lessons
- Be added to my email list to receive announcements about upcoming gigs
- Hire one of my groups for a private party or wedding reception

You can email me at jeanneoconnor1@gmail.com

or call me at 518-744-9739.

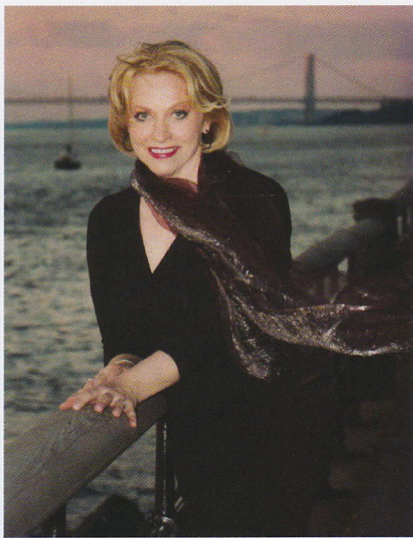
I'm also on Pandora! Just search for my name -- you'll get a "station" with my music along with that of other jazz singers.

My CD (or individual tracks) is available through iTunes, or here: <http://www.cdbaby.com/cd/jeanneoconnor>

Or email me and I can sell you a CD and send it through the mail!



What's your passion or art? We want to talk to you too!



That Night at Panza's

by resident writer **Jeanne O'Connor**

It was at Panza's, I think, that I finally got over the whole Manhattan thing.

Having spent my entire adult life as a devoted New Yorker, I had to be

dragged kicking and screaming up to Saratoga by my then-fiance, David Atkatz, a now retired professor of physics at Skidmore college. How could an admittedly lovely upstate town compete with the diversity, convenience, and energy of life in the greatest city in the world? I had wonderful friends, a nice apartment, and a dizzying array of takeout food at my fingertips. As a singer of jazz and pop music, I had managed to perform and record with some of the best musicians in the world, players who also worked with the likes of Tony Bennett and James Taylor.

But when I finally married David and became pregnant with Daniel some 14 years ago, my fate was sealed. It was time to move upstate.

I did not make things easy for anyone. I insisted on staying primarily in our Upper West Side apartment for the pregnancy; I was in my 40s and wanted to be near my high-risk obstetrician. Due to some minor complications, I did not really unpack my bags in our Regatta View house until five days after the baby was born. All at once, I was a mother; a stepmom to David's older boys, Nick and Jon; and a Saratogian.

A year later, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. It was then that the sweetness of Saratoga really began to reveal itself to me. My lovely neighbors in Regatta View organized regular meals for our family. One neighbor, a breast cancer survivor herself, sat through chemo with me. I entrusted my care to a smart and sympathetic Saratoga oncologist, David Mastrianni. My husband, my stepsons, and the fine teachers at the Greenberg Child Care Center at Skidmore helped me to nurture Daniel as I went through treatment. I recovered.

As Daniel grew a bit older, I began to make inroads into the Capital Region music scene, doing gigs, finishing and releasing a CD, meeting musicians. Which brings me to that night at Panza's. I had already done some gigs with a fabulous pianist named Peg Delaney. I knew she was playing with a singer at Panza's, so I drove around the lake to that venerable Italian restaurant.

The singer was one Colleen Pratt, born and bred of a musical family in Schenectady and a favorite of local musicians and fans.

She swung into a tune and I found myself taking a deep breath. Wow, she was good – as good as any of my fellow singers in the Big Town. A few songs later, her sister Patty came up to the mic and joined her in perfect two-part harmony. Then a cousin named Bobby Van Detta got up to play guitar and sing, and slayed me with his talent. I suddenly felt as though I was hanging out in a club on 52nd Street in the jazz heyday of in the 1950s, or in a bar on Bourbon Street in New Orleans, where great musicians hop from club to club.

Since then I have sung many times at Panza's, sometimes warbling with the ebullient singer Michael Panza. I've performed with different groups at many other Saratoga venues: Caffè Lena, the Saratoga Arts Festival, Mouzon House, the Crown Grill, One Caroline, the rooftop of the Tang Museum. I've brought some of my city musicians up to Saratoga for some fun gigs. Truly, this town offers an exceptional number of venues for musicians of all stripes!

And as a voice teacher and coach, I've worked with many wonderful voice students, from the ages of 8 to 80.

I am lucky to work with a range of different groups, some straight-ahead jazz, some a mix of jazz, pop, and R&B. That's partly because the fine musicians in this area tend to be more generous with their time and their talent than my city sidemen. My upstate players usually don't have to run to feed a parking meter or deal with some awful gridlock at the Midtown Tunnel to get to the next gig.

On the family front, my son has access to an excellent public school system without the stress that accompanies education in NY City. For Daniel, there's skiing, sailing, kayaking, and rowing, literally in his Regatta View backyard.

We still get down to the city quite a bit, for gigs, theater, friends and fun. New York will never lose its hold on me. It's a place where you can look up at a building and see layers of history and envision the lives of generations of New Yorkers who have come before you. I love Central Park in the spring; Riverside Park on the Hudson in any season. I still marvel at the incredible array of faces and fashions on any subway car. I love the bagels, the Chinese food, the Greek diners.

But gentle Saratoga has just about cured me of my Manhattan snobbery, and for that and so much more, I thank this jewel of an upstate town.