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Tracy Bonham

The motherload and making music her own way.

BY NIKI KAOS

Tracy Bonham. Photo provided.

Tracy Bonham knows a thing or two about writing catchy songs with smart lyrics that make you feel like you're in on the joke with her: the kind of sarcasm tinged with an authentic examination of self and relationship that the best alt-rockers wear proudly on their sleeve.

Her 1996 debut studio release, *The Burdens of Being Upright* went Gold within a year. The full-throated anthem "Mother Mother" topped the Billboard Alt-Rock charts and captured the hearts of those ready to blaze trails and embrace the trial and error of independence.

But Tracy Bonham's desire to create music dives waaaaay deeper than her debut album. She has a lot of things to say. Her classical training and multi-instrumental talent produce richly textured arrangements. Exploring music styles

on her later albums, you hear the well-rounded ear of a seasoned musician. Jazz, blues, Americana, pop – the mood fits the song, and the lyrics drive the mood.

Capital Region music lovers are in for a treat because Tracy Bonham is one of the headliners for the Saratoga New Year's Fest lineup. This fangirl got to ask her about what life has been like since that first hit single. I was amply rewarded with real talk about the music scene and insider info on some exciting new projects!

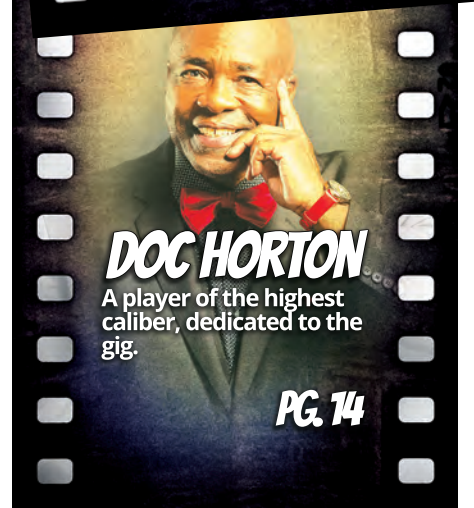
RRX: You're a big inspiration for me! What got you started writing Alt-rock songs? You began on classical violin, which requires rigorous training to master. But it seems your rebellious streak got the better of you and

the pull of the rock-n-roll world was irresistible?

TB: So yeah, the training, the pressure. I also was very self-motivated. I really wanted to do well. I'd practice four hours a day. I loved all my experiences with really intensive summer camps like Interlochen. I started playing in semi-professional symphonies and loved it! Loved the music, loved everything about it.

But, I also had this rebellious streak. And for me, music was more about expression, and I started to become discouraged when I went to University of Southern California. I got the full scholarship, which really saved me because my SAT scores and my other academics were not so great.

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So luckily, I got into a really good conservatory type school because I played so well. However, when I would do “juries”, you practice your piece, and you’d get up there and play for the head of the string department and the dean of the school and whoever was there to grade you.

My grades for techniques were meh, but then really high scores on the emotional component. And, it was discouraging, to say the least, because I practiced a lot. And I wasn’t amazing, and I wasn’t bad. There were clearly other players there that were better.

And I was hanging on because my work ethic was high, especially the last few years of high school. And I had a nemesis because I wanted to get first chair. And I always got second because Pilar Bradshaw always got the first chair. But she inspired me to get second place in the state solo competitions.

Anyway, the fact was that I knew I



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was never going to be “it” on the violin. I knew I was never going to have a life of real success. I was going to sit in the back of the second violin section. My dream would have been the Boston Symphony Orchestra. And the more I looked at that world... I actually went to an open rehearsal at the BSO one time when I was visiting Boston, and I saw the faces on these people. (laughs)

I probably projected it, and I made a big ole judgement. And they were probably playing something they played 18,000 times before, like the “1812 Overture”. But I saw these violinists and their faces were just like, drooping. They looked so miserable. And I was like, nope. Why am I gonna kill myself to have this end up being my life?

I had also been an actor in musical theatre, I was like, that is way more fun, and I can reach more people. I can actually move people if I just do my own thing. So, I transferred to Berklee College of Music because that was the only thing I could think of. I wanted to sing jazz, actually.

RRX: That doesn’t surprise me. You have a very jazzy voice.

TB: Oh, well, thank you. And now I can really accept that. Maybe in the nineties I would have been like, no, I don’t. (laughs)

RRX: It’s funny how we learn about ourselves. Some people accept it, and some people don’t.

People mature in different ways. When I think about what you achieved at such a young age, maybe you didn’t realize how mature you really were at the time?

TB: I did not.

RRX: What was it like? You get to Boston. You’re training, singing. You get involved in the music industry out there. And your hit “Mother, Mother” resonated with a LOT of people. But now you’re trapped in this music industry at kind of a young age. You’ve got this single and you’re in the middle

of this craziness?

TB: Sometimes I look back like, What? Was? That? Because it was like a tornado just came through town and, whoop! I got swooped up, and now I’m not in Kansas. I don’t even know where I am anymore.

I had literally only started writing songs. I was in a wedding band and singing jingles, and I dropped out of Berkeley because I was already gigging. And of course, I was 21 and really doing some stupid s**t as well... which, that’s my first album. It was about all that stupid s**t, and that stupid dude who made me do all this stupid s**t.

I had only written maybe three songs, which is so wild, because I barely played guitar. But I started writing songs that were gonna kind of deconstruct my classical upbringing, too. Songs that only had a barre cord up and down the neck, that would be “Mother, Mother”, basically. Or songs that only had three chords, A, E, D, whatever, because I was thumbing my nose... Or not thumbing, because I always loved my classical upbringing and always brought it around with me, but I was challenging it. I was really rebelling against it.

And I bought that Rat pedal for my guitar, and I screamed, or whatever, because I was like, really trying to shed the skin of the classical strictness that I was always bumping up against. You know, it was always kind of bringing me down, and I loved it so much. It was like this real feeling, not of betrayal. But, you know, I’ve always been one to question authority.

So, I’d only written a handful of songs, and they were all just an attempt to do something different with my musical abilities. And then, BOOM! I got swept away by this tsunami of music industry people who were flying up to Boston from New York and taking me out and sending me flowers and champagne and limos.

I even found some old photos the other day of the person who ended up being my A&R guy. He flew to Spain because I was performing in some weird show in Spain in 1994 and he brought me to Barcelona. I was, okay...? But I’m not really a songwriter yet. I mean, it was really harrowing, and they all gravitated towards another song, not just “Mother, Mother”. It was the song called “The One” thinking that was gonna be THE one, right?

RRX: Right!

TB: Yeah! And they had this demo of “The One” that still is better than what was on the album. But everybody loved that. And it was all over WFNX radio alternative station, and that was this big buzz. And I was like, OK, then... we’re doing this.

It was like an about face, and I was immature, actually. I was not prepared for that stuff like fame and pressure. I was still discovering who I was, and probably trying to keep myself in a box - at the same time fighting against that box that other people put around me. Like, you’re an angry woman now, so you must write angry songs. Why are you so angry? What does it feel like to be a woman in music art?

It was really hard. Actually, it was not freeing...

RRX: I want to hear more of this story, but we’re out of space! Pick up an Xperience Monthly December issue to find out how Tracy manifested her shift away from the trappings of the music industry, and toward a life surrounded by music that she loves!

Tracy is bringing her amazing new trio of musicians with her to Saratoga New Year’s Fest December 31st! For tickets and more information, visit their website at: <https://www.saratoga.org/tourism/saratoga-new-years-fest/>

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Saxo Claus

Luke McNamee has a decades-long passion for the holidays and sweet, sweet music.

BY LIAM SWEENEY

Saxo Claus (Luke McNamee. Photo provided.)

When bells jingle and eyes twinkle in the holiday season of the Capital Region, we may be privy to hot chocolate and holly sprigs, fresh snowfall and 'Seasons Greetings' signs done up in elaborate typefaces. But if our special privy is happening on the streets of the Troy Victorian Stroll or any of the countless holiday street walks in the Capital Region, we might encounter Santa Claus. Or rather, a roaming sax player they call Saxo Claus.

I connect with Luke McNamee, better known as Saxo Claus.

RRX: You are Luke McNamee, mild mannered musician who upon being fed at midnight during the holiday season becomes Saxo Claus. When did you first don the red suit? Was it something sort of on the moment, doing some holiday gig, or was it an idea you had to officially become Saxo Claus?

LM: So the idea for Saxo Claus came to me in October of 1997. It was an autumn day just like today, and I was just sitting contemplating, you know, what I'm gonna do. Blue Hand Luke was also coincidentally starting at the same time, I think I had done one Blue Hand Luke gig already and I was thinking about how that was gonna fit into my future. And I was just thinking - at that time I would occasionally, and by occasionally, I mean, maybe once every two years or three years, I would get asked to play some sort of a Christmas party and they'd say just come dressed as you are and play a couple of Christmas tunes. I knew a few Christmas tunes and like I said, that happened maybe every other year or every third year. And I was over there sitting; I'll never forget I was sitting on my porch and I thought to myself, what would happen if I bought myself or

rented or borrowed a Santa Claus suit and a beard. and approached it that way? And so I went to the Costumer and I got myself a standard Santa Claus suit and a beard and a matching wig and the hat and the whole shebang. And funny thing is, is that, that first year I did it in 1997.

The first gig ever I played was the Greens Party, uh which is a, a pre- Troy Victorian Stroll party uh right there on 2nd street. And I played that. and they really liked me and somebody was there from the Troy Victorian Stroll, and they asked me if I wanted to be part of that year's Stroll. And I said, sure. And before the day was over, Hudson Winter Walk was already in touch with me. And uh they wanted to know if I would like to play their Winter Walk, which is the night before the Troy Victorian Stroll. So that I was only a week going in this thing. And already I

had two of the biggest Victorian street events in the capital district wanting me and I did them both that year. And I'm proud to say that um I'm starting to lose track of how many years this has been. But I think I'm starting my 26th or 27th season. I'm gonna have to count that sometime.

RRX: So I first saw you, I mean, Saxo Claus, at the Victorian Stroll in Troy, is that your favorite event? If so why? And if not, where has Saxo Claus been that has given him the warmest of fuzzies?

LM: Uh, another good question. Well, you know, unfortunately I promised everybody who hires me, especially with the Victorian street walks that theirs is my favorite. So, if I say any one of theirs is my favorite and the other ones are reading it, they're gonna get mad. So I, I love them all. They all actually have a unique flavor to each one.

Besides doing Troy and the Hudson Strolls. I also do the Saratoga Victorian Street Walk, the Hudson Winter Walk and also the Kinderhook Candlelight Night and other things like the Speedo Rally and the Troy Farmers Market and the Albany International Airport. I've been playing every year since the first year and they're all very unique. They really are and the little interactions that happen while you're, you're out there being Santa Claus, like children coming up to me giving me their Christmas list thinking it's a good idea to hand it to me personally rather than risk putting it in the mail and having it get lost in the mail. So some very smart Children hand it to me personally and I commend them for that

I love it when, when they hand me their list and the big smiles on their faces. So I don't have one that's a favorite over the other. I really love them all and my favorite thing is the interaction with the people because when you're playing with a band, you're up on a stage and there's kind of a invisible barrier between. you and your audience. And with being Saxo Claus playing on the street, which I do so much of as Saxo Claus, there's no barrier.

RRX: I'll ask a pretty heavy question here. Why do we need Saxo Claus? Uh We have Mariah Carey and we're out there avoiding waged and convenience stores and supermarkets. What does Saxo Claus offer us that the usual usual Christmas ear worms don't?

LM: That's a good question. Um Another one you're asking very good questions today, Liam. See, what does Saxo Claus offer that the Mariah Careys and everybody else doesn't offer? Uh. For me, it's this. every artist who becomes popular from Mariah Carey to Taylor Swift to Vince Gill. I mean, I could just keep naming people after they become famous. They put out a Christmas album. and that's a good thing; they're famous now, they can put out an album. I give Christmas music without being famous. No, that doesn't mean I don't wanna be famous. and that doesn't mean that I spend some amount of time in every day of my life purposely trying to configure my world so that I'll be famous because I wanna be famous. I'm gonna go on record as saying, I wanna be famous. And even though I'm well past the age that most people, for example, the two people that we just mentioned, Mariah Carey, Vince Gill and add Taylor Swift, all achieved fame and were world famous when they were much younger than me. I still have that dream alive in my heart. that I wanna make great music. I wanna be Saxo Claus and yes, I would love to be world famous for being Saxo Claus someday where you would think of me when you think of a Mariah Carey or any of them, your next thought would be. Oh yeah. And that Saxo Claus guy, he does some really cool music

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Doc Horton

*Musician, professor,
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BY ROB SMITTIX

Doc Horton. Photo credit Will Daley.

RRX: How are you doing?

DH: I'm doing great. I mean, we had a phenomenal concert on Sunday evening. There was about 150 people there. Everybody was rocking. I had about 20 people constantly down on the stage dancing with me. The caterer was excellent. I catered the party myself because I wanted to share that with the community. I could not have planned it better. My band was on point and I was dancing my tail off.

RRX: Well, I did get a chance to see some of the highlights. It definitely looked like it was a good time. I see you played a new song that you just released as well.

DH: Yes, we debuted the new single "Reality".

RRX: Yeah, man. So, yeah, that's cool that things are going good.

DH: Oh, yeah. In fact we christened, the new J Street Park for the city. We played there too. I tell you, we had folks dancing, bopping and swaying. We had a great time.

RRX: How cool is that?

DH: Yeah, man. You know, the Doc Horton and the Jay Street Band had opened up the new Jay Street Park.

RRX: Is that the same Jay Street you're band is named after?

DH: Oh yeah, that is the Jay Street. We actually got our start 11 years ago at Ambition Cafe on Jay Street. That's why we call it the Jay Street band. Talk about coming full circle. In 2015 when that fire hit, a friend of mine, Jeff Yule and I

co-produced a concert at Proctor's to raise money for the fire victims. In fact, we raised several thousands dollars. When it happened, I immediately called Jeff and said, 'look we gotta do something.' At the time, we were the official house band for Ronald McDonald House and Jeff was executive director. I don't know if you know Jeff.

RRX: I don't think so.

DH: He's no longer with Ronald McDonald House but at the time he and I put our heads together and put together that concert. So us being able to christen the park just seemed to be symbolic and poetic justice.

RRX: Yeah, for sure. I didn't even realize that's where the name came from. Jay Street, is like the coolest

street in Schenectady.

DH: It is. In fact, we closed out the Jazz on Jay series this summer. Again, we had the folks dancing. We're the ultimate Motown pop funk party band. Everybody loves Motown from 2 years old to 82.

RRX: How could you not?

DH: We enjoy what we do and most importantly, my company, HDH always gives back to the community. I call it the company with a conscience. We always adopt a charity and this year we've adopted "More Music, Less Violence." You've probably heard of it. It's a charity that focuses on steering kids in a positive way through music.

RRX: I've been seeing a lot about that actually. I didn't know that you

were helping out with it.

DH: In fact DJ Hollyw8d is the founder and director. He was the emcee. We're gonna put a few things together and continue to do things together. He's a great guy. In fact, he won the Eddie Award for DJ of the Year this past year.

RRX: Did he win the Listen Up Award too?

DH: No, he didn't win the Listen Up but he was nominated.

RRX: And you were also a nominee for a Listen Up Awards as well.

DH: Two years in a row.

RRX: Hey, well, we got our third year coming now. So you never know.

DH: Just gotta keep praying. I tell you, I remember this past year. I was in the front row at the Listen Up Awards and enjoying the program. It's a great award program and it's good that you guys put that together.

RRX: Yeah, we were just kinda like, 'hey, let's do it and not take it so seriously and have fun.' How long have you been doing music? Pretty much your whole life, I imagine?

DH: Well, I started off as a child with my mom influencing me with Motown. Even as a child singing and writing songs throughout my teens and through college. In college during my senior year, three things happened. First my group broke up. Secondly, I wrote the song "Reality" that fall of 77; (I graduated in 78) and I got an offer to go to grad school at Penn State. I said well, I'll just go up there get my masters and come back home. As soon as I got there, they gave me an offer to get my PHD. So I said, OK, I'll get my PHD. Then I got offered to get a job as a professor. 34 years later, I was a full professor and a success in sociology at three universities. I'm now at Suny Albany, I've been there for 29 years. I've been a professor for 40. A professor of sociology.

RRX: So you're a real doc? Unlike Doctor Dre or Doctor J.

DH: That's right. I'm a real doctor. The interesting thing is that back in March of 2012, I met this guy, he was a

musician and professor. I told him about my background. He invited me to sing a couple of songs with his band, so I did. He got back with me with a message that knocked me off of my feet. He said, Doc, we've got two bands but we want to start a third band backing you up. My instinct was to say no but I had to stop and think a minute. At the time I was 56 years old, I'm now 67 and if the good Lord spares me, next month, I'll be 68.

RRX: Amen.

DH: I said, if I don't do it now, when will I do it? I did not want to be that elder statesman rocking on the front porch saying, if I'd only gotten got back into the music business. So we started a third band. We also started a company with three bands and we were together for a year and a half. But then I realized something very important... I realized that you can't have a company with three bosses. My dream was always to be like Berry Gordy, the founder of Motown. To be able to find young talent and groom them. I didn't have a dream to be Michael Jackson. So what I decided to do was to amicably leave the company. Although I invested quite a bit in finishing off a studio in one of the guys homes. I decided to forego all of that. But I kept my band name.

In 2014, I started my own company. I invested in my own equipment and then I restarted my band. I haven't looked back!

For the last 11 years, with the exception of the COVID years, I actually have been producing at least two concerts a year. I just believe in creating opportunities for my band and not waiting for opportunities.

RRX: Well thank you for your time, anything on the horizon?

DH: We've got some plans that we're working on for the national tour. We'll have some tour dates coming up soon!



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Prog Digest

Holiday Edition

BY KLYDE KADIDDLEHUMPER

Welcome to an extra special holiday Prog Digest.

In it's usual timeslot, these musings discuss music – well, nominally. The reins are noted for being very loose and the topics the same.

For today's lesson, boys and girls, we are going to explore a singular blip on the holiday radar.

A John Waters Christmas.

John Waters is, in the truest meaning of the phrase, an American treasure. An icon. A visionary. And, by account of our own beloved Jimmy Barrett, (check him out Monday nights on RadioRadioX.com with Kaleidoscope – at over 50 years running, likely the longest running single host radio program EVER) a lovely man. Conversive, nice, engaging and, best of all, John Waters.

A short history.

Still an active man, John Waters is from Baltimore and has written, directed, produced and created some of the most interesting films of our time. Perhaps most well know is Hairspray – a movie first, then Broadway musical.

Heck – he has a star on the Walk of Fame. Look him up, maybe check out some of the movies. Mind blowing.

John Waters is, of course, not the first icon of oddity to hail from Baltimore. While Charm City is home to Charm City Bakery (Duff is an engaging guy) and The Wire television program.....those are only the latest. Before all of this was – Edgar Allen Poe. Writer of, well, nightmares and stories of the incredible and horrific. To give you an idea where this author comes from, I've a distant cousin (well, 3rd or

4th removed as I recall), who wrote well received monographs on Edgar.

Now, on to the Christmas album.

This being a family publication and all, I'll try to limit this to titles that are, well, a little more wholesome (ummmmmmm.....sorta)

Even John admits in the liners that most of us don't really want another Christmas album. I mean, come on – as I write this at the start of November there are 3, count 'em 3, local terrestrial radio stations playing nothing but Christmas music. Haven't these people heard that continual Christmas/holiday music is psychologically damaging? One can have Mariah Carey nightmares (met a guy with a really interesting Mariah story that is not for publication here, but ask me if we run into each other).

John takes a very different approach. This is a fun loving, irreverent record. There are traditional songs, like Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer – as done by Tiny Tim. Or Sleigh Ride – Alvin and the Chipmunks.

Love it or hate it, Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer is a holiday family favourite. Not on this record, but popular. John Waters alternative is Here Comes Fatty Claus – sort of an urban combination of that and Christmas with the Family. We all know that the pressure of the holidays has a habit of making the disfunction we usually see grow with bloated, unrealizable expectations. Don't get it twisted – if you let it kinda flow over you, Christmas and the other holidays have great stuff going for them. John has it just right – a

little more diversity in holiday listening might just be a balm in Gilead.

What a fun ride. If you are easily offended, perhaps not for you as about a third is a bit off, in what I find to be the most endearing way possible. There is even a John Waters Christmas 2023 TOUR – check it out at City Winery in NYC Dec 17 and 19. Should there be another John Waters Christmas Album, maybe he could incorporate something Pastafarian. Don't know that one – well, look it up. All I will point out is that it is, maybe, the most John Waters thing John Waters never did.

This is the point at which I recommend you check out RadioRadioX.com for the best in radio and all things Xperience Monthly. No agendas, no preaching. Music, arts and culture are all we do. And if this little missive is in your wheelhouse, join me every month.

Now – as John Waters implores you – Have a merry, rotten, scary, sexy, biracial, ludicrous, happy little Christmas.

Until next time –

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<p>December 16th 11am-1pm Family Holiday Party Join us for a holiday party. Bring the kids to make a graham cracker house, do a holiday craft, and maybe even learn a little holiday magic! Adult craft also available. <small>(Sponsored by the Friends of the Library)</small></p>	<p>January 13th 12-5pm Community Showcase Show off your hobby or unique items at the libraries community showcase.</p>

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The Spirit of Radio



BY MIKE STAMPALIA

Begin the day with a friendly voice

A companion, unobtrusive

Plays that song that's so elusive

And the magic music makes your morning mood

"The Spirit of Radio" – Song by Rush, lyrics by Neil Peart, 1980.

I like Spotify.

Each month, I shell out 17 bucks so that my family and I can listen to (pretty much) any music we want, whenever we want to. Sure, there are holes – Neil and Joni and some others are glaring omissions. But for a big music dork like me, the ability to just pull up a song whenever it crosses my mind is worth it.

Sirius XM is okay, too.

Sometimes I'm in the mood to (just) listen to hair metal, or blues, or outlaw country, or the deepest cuts from Bruce I can find. And it is nice to have a channel

that's out there, waiting to deliver exactly that. It's fun. For a while...

But I inevitably get bored. Spotify is a musical echo chamber. It either plays you exactly what you tell it to, or it tries to figure out what is most like what you already like. It's musical social media, and I think we can all agree, social media is garbage. Sirius XM is mostly just a cross between "random play" and an algorithm built around painfully small playlists. I mean, if I'm listening to "Deep Tracks," I shouldn't hear "TVC 15" four times a week. Pretty sure Bowie has a deeper catalog than that.

No, what I always end up seeking out is surprise. Discovery. Curation. EXCITEMENT.

I need a DJ. Not an algorithm, not a playlist. A real-life person who is going to presume to tell me what I'm missing out on, musically. Somebody who has

thought – DEEPLY - about how that last song will segue into this next song. Someone for whom the music they are playing is important, down to the smallest detail, and who's going to tell me about it. Someone who's going to introduce me to something I haven't heard before.

The world has grown to believe it doesn't need DJs anymore. But the world is wrong.

Rush – the legendary band that created the song cited at the top of this column – tends to divide listeners into two camps: those who recognize the group as unparalleled musicians and songwriters who made some of the most enduring and mind-blowing music the rock world has ever heard, and those who are wrong. But the truth is, in 1974, Rush were perilously close to being relegated to obscurity as no-talent Zeppelin-wannabes before they ever got started. But for one lonely

DJ by the name of Donna Halper, who listened to the unknown Canadian band, determined that the too-long (by common wisdom) "Working Man" would appeal to her factory-town Cleveland audience, and began to play them. 40 million records later, a lot of people came to hear what Ms. Halper heard.

There are, of course, the high-profile DJs.

John Peel, the famed English DJ on BBC Radio 1, was a relentless and immensely influential champion of new, boundary-pushing music. Commonly accepted as the first man to put the Ramones on the radio in the UK, he also championed David Bowie well before he "broke" onto the world stage. He steadfastly kept playing the Pistols' "God Save the Queen" after it had been banned, was onto Nirvana very very early, and was instrumental to the success of both the

Specials and Happy Mondays. That's some range.

The recently departed, her-name-is-better-than-your-name, Dusty Street was impossible to pigeonhole. Known for boosting up-and-coming new wave acts such as Depeche Mode and Duran Duran, she was also a big proponent of punk, blues, jazz, and just about anything else, as long as it was good. She was the first American DJ to play Billy Idol's "White Wedding," proudly self-identified as a "goth," and was fired from KROQ after a Corporate takeover. Dusty had something to tell all of us, and she didn't let anyone or anything get in the way of that.

Jim "The Last DJ" Ladd's whole identity is tied to an almost religious devotion to the importance of "free-form" radio. And he's right. Free-form radio is where the music is hand-picked by the DJ, and not constrained by playlists, formatting, time constraints, or commercialism in general. As a young DJ, while on-air, he got a phone call from anti-war protesters in LA's Griffith Park, saying they were listening to him during the protest. He immediately pivoted into a set that included the Doors "Unknown Soldier" and Lennon's "I Don't Want to Be a Soldier," amongst others. Can you imagine that happening on today's commercial stations? Me neither.

And let's not forget the true unsung hero: the College Radio DJ. Is it all good? Absolutely not, there's an awful lot of self-indulgent, unlistenable garbage out there. But, oh man, if you want to hear something new and exciting, this is where you'll find it. College radio is where I first heard the Smiths and Big Black. It's where I first heard house music, years before it would find a home on the QE2's dance floor on Tuesday nights. It's where I first heard Public Enemy, and "Cooky Puss" by some unknown drunken idiots calling themselves the Beastie Boys. More recently, it's where I first heard Bright Dog Red, the jazzy, improvisational, avant-in-the-best-sense-of-the-word group from right here in Albany. Check

them out, thank me later.

You don't outgrow college radio when you turn 23.

Let's not overlook the importance of a local connection. What you hear on Sirius XM comes from some anonymous suit's laptop somewhere. The very-English John Peel, based out of the UK, was a monumental DJ, but ultimately could never be "my" DJ for that reason. Ladd was nothing if not West Coast, so while I may love what he did, it doesn't "speak to me" the same way I'm sure it did for those kids in Griffith Park. I want my DJs to be from HERE. I want them plugged into our local bands, knowing who's coming to town, and just generally to appreciate and "feel" the Upstate NY vibe. The Capital District is not NYC, Troy is not Albany, and neither one is Saratoga. I want someone who understands that and can connect musically to those of us who live right HERE, right NOW.

So, I implore you: take your musical life off random. We have great choices here. Radioradiox is based out of Cohoes, has DJ-curated free-form music every morning and evening, and is beautifully independent and local-focused. We have great college stations – WCDB (SUNY Albany), WRPI (RPI), and WSPN (Skidmore) to name just a few. Don't overlook public radio – these are not your parents' public radio stations. There is some great music on them. And if you find yourself flipping aimlessly around the dial, vaguely disappointed and wondering what's missing...

It's probably a good DJ.
As we celebrate mediocrity
All the boys upstairs want to see
How much you'll pay for
What you used to get for free
There goes the last DJ
Who plays what he wants to play
Who says what he wants to say

Hey hey hey

*"The Last DJ" – Song by Tom Petty,
lyrics by Tom Petty, 2002.*

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Dawn Clifford



BY STEPHANIE J BARTIK

*Art, Rebirth,
and the
friendships
that blend
well over
time.*

Dawn Clifford. Photo by
Stephanie J Bartik.

On my way to photograph a band in the north country, I heard that a local band members' mother was at a gallery showing a few of her paintings, so I stopped in and met Dawn Clifford, the mother of Johnny Clifford, lead singer of The BrokenHearted-Tom Petty Tribute. I was intrigued to find that creativity and artistry must run through the genes of this exceptional family. In the quiet town of Glens Falls, nestled in upstate New York, a nonagenarian artist named Dawn Clifford is making waves in the local art scene. With a gallery showing at the Betty O'Brien Gallery in the Shirt Factory, Dawn's story is one of resilience, friendship, and a lifelong love for painting.

Dawn's artistic journey began in the 1970s, sparked by a friend who introduced her to the basics of acrylic

painting. She dabbled in this new passion, even winning first prize at an "On my own time" show. However, life's twists and turns led her away from the canvas for almost two decades. She felt blocked, unable to put brush to canvas, she then, put the brush away.

In 1990, fate intervened when she received the gift of private lessons from a local artist. The classes reignited her artistic flame, this time with watercolors. But it wasn't until she joined forces with fellow artist Bernice Mennis that Dawn truly found her creative voice. Their shared love for art brought them together, even though they worked with different mediums—Bernice with oil paint and Dawn with a thicker form of acrylic on canvas.

The duo met weekly, exchanging not just tips and ideas, but also

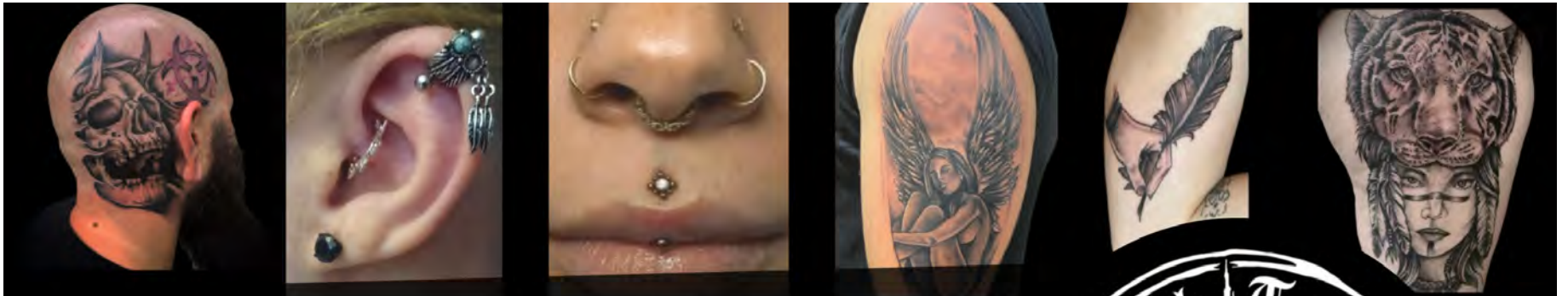
providing each other with the inspiration and company necessary to sustain a creative journey. Dawn attributes much of her artistic persistence to Bernice, a friend who became both a muse and a motivator.

Through Bernice's invitation, Dawn became part of North Country Arts and exhibited her work in various galleries, including the now-closed Chestertown location. She found joy in seeing her creations adorn the walls of these artistic spaces and relished the opportunity to connect with other local talents.

The Shirt Factory gallery became a significant venue for Dawn, where she displayed her art for many years. Volunteering at gallery shows, she discovered a unique way to engage with the vibrant local art community, fostering connections that enriched her artistic experience.

Now, after over 25 years of shared artistic endeavors, Dawn and Bernice have the honor of showcasing their work at the Betty O'Brien Gallery. It's a testament to their enduring friendship and the creative synergy that has fueled their passion for art. The exhibit at North Country Arts in the Shirt Factory offers a glimpse into Dawn Clifford's world, a world where art transcends age, and the canvas becomes a timeless expression of a life well-lived.

For those curious to witness Dawn's artistic journey firsthand, it will be an opportunity to step into the vivid world of a local nonagenarian artist whose paintings speak volumes about the beauty of rediscovery, friendship, and the enduring power of creativity. Look for her everywhere you look for art.



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