

# Stephanie Barber: A Remembrance

Stephanie Barber, who with her first husband Philip ran the fabled Music Inn in Lenox, Massachusetts during the 1950s, passed away of heart failure on August 26, 2003, at the age of 84. The local paper referred to her as one of the "doyennes" of the Berkshires, and that's right on target. A colorful, likeable figure, Stephanie was a supporter of the arts, right up to the end.

Barber and her husband, Arthur Collins, had just returned from a performance of the Boston Pops at Tanglewood on Monday evening, Aug. 25, when she complained of chest pains. Collins drove her to the local hospital, where she died a couple of hours later.

Music Inn, as originally envisioned, was a resort with an emphasis on world-class performing musicians, Stephanie told *The Berkshire Eagle* in 1998, on the occasion of a Music Inn tribute that was produced by the National Music Foundation.

I was a member of the planning committee for that 1998 event. And, while I've seen Stephanie frequently since that evening, that tribute is what I will remember most vividly. The joyful celebration was characteristic of Stephanie and her many fans within the music world. I was privileged to sit at the dinner table with Dave and Iola Brubeck, Bill Russo, and Percy Heath, among others. More than 200 people attended her memorial on Oct. 4 here in Lenox, including many performers and former students from the School of Jazz. Dave Brubeck and Eli Wallach were among those who sent video appreciations.

Music Inn's list of performers included the biggest names of jazz musicians of the day: Miles Davis, Buddy Rich, Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday, Sonny Rollins, Stan Getz and a host of others. Randy Weston, a dishwasher in Lenox at the time, recalled being encouraged to start his public piano playing by Stephanie.

Music Inn was a model of equality, her stepson Benjamin Barber told the 1998 tribute; there was never a sense of racism at Music Inn, even during these years of rampant segregation and bias in various locations around the country.

In addition to continuing the tradition of stunning jazz performances, Music Inn also featured discussions by jazz legends on the nature of the genre. In 1956, during a series of Roundtables, Marshall Stearns, John Lewis and the Barbers came up with the concept of a "School of Jazz" that would feature jazz performers working as teachers to up-and-coming enthusiasts. Stephanie gave primary credit for the idea to Stearns, who had started the first history of jazz course at NYU with George Avakian (and briefly involving John Hammond, as well), but it is Stephanie Barber's name that will be forever attached to the school's legacy, at least here in The Berkshires.

Formally known as The School of Jazz at Lenox, the faculty comprised a cast of virtuosos: Max Roach, Dizzy Gillespie, Jimmy Giuffre and others (including William Russo, who was master of ceremonies at the 1998 tribute and who passed away earlier this year). The school lasted until 1961. The Barbers (Stephanie and her late husband Philip) eventually sold the property in the mid-1960s.

Jazz researcher Michael Fitzgerald has long hosted a website devoted to Music Inn, and to the School of Jazz in particular, including descriptions of the many recordings (authorized and bootleg) that were made there. In 1993, Mike wrote that the school "holds a special significance in the history of jazz education. It was one of the first instances where the world's greatest jazz musicians were enlisted as faculty and where jazz was taught to promising young musicians. The Berklee College of Music had been founded in 1945 by Lawrence Berk, but the quantity, quality and stature of the Lenox teachers has never been equaled. It is truly remarkable to examine the list of Lenox students and note the amazing number of highly influential musicians that participated in these summer programs."

A visit to Mike's site is well worthwhile, and you can find material on the School of Jazz at Lenox at [www.jazzdiscography.com/Lenox/lenhome.htm](http://www.jazzdiscography.com/Lenox/lenhome.htm)

I saved a 1961 issue of *DownBeat* magazine announcing that the school had closed; the issue was precious not because of that article, but because the story shared the news page with a report on the Villanova University Intercollegiate Jazz Festival. You see, I was headed for Villanova the ensuing autumn, and eventually would run that Festival. So, although we didn't know it, Stephanie and I go back some 40 years. What a thrill it was to meet her, to know her, and to work on that joyful tribute in 1998.

Projectile Arts, Inc., with veteran producer Ben Barenholtz, is in the throes of creating a documentary on Music Inn, and fortunately had spent about 4 hours interviewing Stephanie, according to the local newspaper. I look forward to seeing the

fruits of this effort.

The Berkshires won't be the same without Stephanie, her colorful and giving personality. As her husband Arthur Collins told The Berkshire Eagle upon her demise, nobody ever had a bad word to say about her. We all should leave such a legacy.

—*Ed Bride* first published this article in October 2003