

La Maestra in the House

A documentary by Julia D'Amico



D'Amico Film Production LLC

The maestra in the film, “La Maestra in the House” is Mary Louise Nanna, first violinist for the Buffalo Philharmonic and musical director/conductor of Ars Nova—a community orchestra established by Mary Louise in 1978 and still going strong 32 years later--or stronger.

Buffalo is a city well known for the music and musicians who have always thrived there. It's a musical town and it's the Ars Nova group and the involvement with it by Mary Louise Nanna that energizes the film and provides a close-up of the effect such a project has on the people and cultural vibes of a city.

I should mention that I know Mary Louise Nanna, also Julia D'Amico who produced and directed the film, indeed they are friends so

anything I say in this review could never be considered objective but I will do my best.

Buffalo is a city of neighborhoods, in Mary-Louise's case it was East Lovejoy—a mix of blue collar immigrant types—German, Polish, Italian. Hers was a family of musicians beginning with her grandfather—Papa Louie—a violinist. Mary Louise's father—Pete the Barber—played clarinet with the mother on piano. There were 4 uncles—two clarinet players, a saxophonist and a drummer.

Sunday was the day for a family gathering and following the food, off came the apron of Mary Louise's mother and down she sat at the piano to hammer out some rousing blues or honky-tonk with the rest of the family joining in. But even among these highly accomplished



performers Mary Louise stood out as an extraordinary talent—a prodigy.

Musicians have a problem—a problem they share with actors which is: the requirement of an audience. Writers can write and painters paint and even if the work is never published or on display in a gallery its too bad but it isn't fatal. The work remains valid.

Music is different. A musician alone in his or her room practicing away does so in a vacuum and the notes, no matter how inspired or exquisitely played, fall on non-existent ears and it is only in the presence of an audience that musicians can take real satisfaction in the practice of their art—or profession. It's like a surgeon without a body to cut upon. That's the musician's problem and for the conductor it's the same. The musician needs an audience and the conductor needs an orchestra.

Back to Mary Louise. Mary Louise wanted to conduct. Why? Because there is a conductor type and she is the type-- something about being up there on the conductors podium hacking furiously with the baton to whip the musicians into an inspired state. Also the conductor is a total musician who must assimilate knowledge of all the instruments and how they integrate within the score to provide the desired effect—the Mary Louise Nanna effect.

That was the beginning of Ars Nova—the church concerts.

Buffalo is a city of churches and a natural venue for these concerts

that feature a core repertoire of the great 17th and 18th century baroque composers: Bach, Vivaldi, Scarlatti, etc. I won't describe any of these events but leave it for you to enjoy them as you watch the film.

What is less apparent is the other hat she wears—the administrative hat—the paperwork, the phone calls, the running of errands, the shopping for this, that, and the other, and all the rest of it—the grunt work—that is indispensable to the smooth running of any community project.

It is a tribute both to the enterprising spirit and sheer physical stamina of this woman and the terrific enthusiasm of the city in its response to her achievement—Ars Nova.

She is amazing and a perfect fit for an extraordinary city.

