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by Melissa E. Monahan

Adolescent girls weren't allowed to wear pants to school when Joan was in grammar school. Except Joan Bujacich: she was the girl who played with the boys. "I was the only girl allowed to wear pants at [Clifton's] School 9," because I performed in the school's talent shows. "Most of the boys were trying to get me in their band because they knew I could play. I had a classical training but I always played in rock bands.

And play she did. The singer, songwriter and classically trained musician found her inspiration in music at a tender age and resolute to take her passion to heights that defy convention. Bujacich was the girl rocker who could do it all.

"I was able to see the rock bands that had some classical influences and I really respected those guys because they could do both," she said. "I was influenced by Ginastera and Prokofiev because of their rhythmic energies and their contemporary harmonies.

As a composer, Bujacich said she writes in many styles for solo piano, chamber ensemble, and small orchestra while also calling on her classical/jazz foundation.

In interviews, Bujacich has been called "terrific," "reminiscent of Sondheim," "beautiful," "diverse" and "eclectic." Her lyrics have been touted as "Zen like," consequently leaving a lot to the listener's imagination.

Yet, Bujacich likens herself to jazz performer Shirley Horne. "She's very minimalist and very sultry, and is a master of presenting a ballad. She is the best accompanist for her

voice," said Bujacich. "She's not a belter. She has a mellow sound in her voice, a sultry, dark jazz sound."

Perhaps part of Bujacich's allure is her approach to music, her allegiance to the truth that she claims can be found in simplicity. "I sing the song and allow it to have it's own integrity," she said. "You don't have to embellish upon the melody and change it."

Bujacich said she brings this philosophy onto the stage at Trumpets, the Montclair jazz club, where she performs every Friday night. whether it's an original ballad or an old pop tune, Bujacich values music for it's inherent power to move people, for the way it makes them feel.

"It's a lifetime journey. There is so much great music and you are always uncovering a great treasure, you never stop learning," she reflected. "People say they can feel that I love what I do and that makes me happy."

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