

Gigging After 9-11

indie-music.com

by Joan Bujacich

Indie-Music.com solicited musician accounts of gigs played immediately after the September 11th attacks, as a measure of how musicians felt when confronted with performing after the disaster. The very first days after the tragedy were the worst, filled with grieving audiences. Many artists noted a heightened sense of emotion and responsibility, along with a gnawing feeling of insecurity - about the appropriateness of music in public, song selection, and their own feelings of grief. Many wrote new songs to process the feelings, and almost all sang traditional patriotic songs. We present a range of reactions from musicians across the USA and Canada.

I play in a lovely restaurant /piano lounge in New Jersey for over 4 years now 2-3 nights a week. I had to play the Wednesday (Sept. 12th) following the immediate tragedy. That night some of the regular crowd was in the bar to share their stories and I along with everyone else was in shock. My music comforted me and my audience but it took the back seat as it should have.

By Saturday night's gig I had learned that I lost a former student in one of the planes and I was grieving even more so I found my job very difficult. It had to be the most awkward night for me to make music .I felt I lacked the confidence even to select appropriate songs. I was in so much pain (though I don't think my audience would know , I kept a brave face with an occasional smile or warmth) that it was difficult for me to rise above. I felt I didn't do my best for the people looking for guidance or for some spiritual dimension that the music could have provided. But I was numb. I went home feeling I let my audience down.

I regrouped over the next few days and really put a lot of thought into what my function should be, what should I play, how can I help in my small way. By my following Wednesday night gig (one week plus after the massacre), I prepared. I decided my small contribution must be to give the people what they want. I should comfort them . I played some classical music to soothe, I played some modern positive thought type pop music for hope, I played some light jazzy numbers to lighten the heart, and I played patriotic music for courage and strength. As a result last night the people in the restaurant were very touched and very appreciative of what I could offer them. My boss was really pleased, my efforts did not go unnoticed. I want to make people feel better, they may escape for a little while or they may experience feelings of hope or they may find strength and courage in some of the music. I never had to approach my music in this way, I never thought I would have to play the repertoire I am playing with the intent that I am playing it. But for now this is my job, this is what I can do and I'm taking it very seriously. - Joan Bujacich, 9/20/2001

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