

I met Marian McPartland in 1994. She had heard me perform in the Thelonious Monk Composers' Competition in Washington, DC, and soon after she called and asked me to appear on *Piano Jazz*. As a young pianist who had not yet released my first recording as a leader, I was thrilled and honored to receive a phone call from the great lady herself.

I remember walking into the studio for the recording of the program. As I put out my hand and introduced myself I tried not to appear too intimidated.

She looked up at me and replied, "the goddamn f***ing piano tuner hasn't shown up yet." I knew then that all would be well.

Behind the legend she was simply another jazz pianist who, like all of us musicians, cared about the music more than about anything else. We became good friends and often I would send her CDs or information on special performances I was giving. She never failed to write back or call me, often making suggestions about how I could grow my career.

After that first 1994 *Piano Jazz* appearance, I appeared on her show in 2001 and again in 2011. We also did a concert together at the Eastman School of Music in 2001. Each time I got to play and spend time with Marian was a treat. Her sense of humor was a delight and her musicianship was always a pleasure to behold.

At some point Marian mentioned to me that she regretted that her tunes had not been recorded more by other artists. I always loved Marian's tunes which is why I recorded them on several of my CDs.

In 2014, after her passing in late 2013, I was thinking about a project to honor Marian and her legacy. Then pianist Peggy Stern invited me to appear at the Wall Street Jazz Festival in Kingston, New York. Peggy wanted something bigger than a trio. I hit upon the idea of arranging some of Marian's music for a larger group. What better way to pay tribute to Marian than at a concert featuring women bandleaders?

The 2014 festival performance gave me the opportunity to write and perform my arrangements of Marian's compositions. But it was the following eight months of workshoping the music with Bill, Virginia, Harvie, and Billy that solidified the arrangements so that we could record. We were fortunate to have Steve come on board to rehearse and join us on the record date.

The last time I saw Marian was at a reading of her biography, shortly before she passed away. It was at a movie theatre on Long Island and a documentary about Marian was also being screened at the event. I had been asked to play some of Marian's tunes on a funky upright piano after her Q & A session with the audience. Selfless and caring as ever, the 95-year-old Marian leaned forward in her wheelchair to express to me her concern that I had not been formally introduced to the crowd, which was understandably more interested in meeting her and getting their books and DVDs signed than in paying attention to my playing.

I was content to play Marian's tunes underneath the din of the festivities, knowing that, seated near the piano, she was at least peripherally enjoying my interpretations, but it was typical of Marian to be so generous, supportive, and concerned. She was one of a kind: a pioneer, both hip and classy, a good friend, and a remarkable human being. I hope she would have enjoyed this recording.

| [--Roberta Piket](#)

