

**marian
mcpartland**
at the peninsula
library
1972





It wasn't easy being a jazz pianist in the rock and soul year of 1972. It was especially not easy being a jazz pianist and a woman, like Marian McPartland, when she played this free "Concert in the Library" at Lawrence, Long Island's Peninsula Public Library on December 10, 1972.

Born Margaret Marian Turner in Slough, England, the beloved future host of "Piano Jazz" on National Public Radio had already come a very long way, evincing such preternatural piano talent as a kid that it had carried her to London's Guildhall School of Music and Drama; to Europe right after D-Day touring with the USO (the USO paid better than Britain's own Entertainment National Service Association); a wartime romance, and very soon marriage, to the legendary Chicago jazz cornetist Jimmy McPartland.

Venturing to the U.S. with her new husband, postwar, Mrs. McPartland quickly carved a name for herself in New York as a leader of her own small group at The Embers on West 54th Street, followed by a record deal with Savoy Records and, finally, a residence at the Hickory House on the historic street of jazz clubs, 52nd Street, that lasted for over a decade and brought her a devout following among jazz insiders.

With jazz overpowered by the rock and roll revolution wrought by the Beatles (the Hickory House closed in 1967), Marian McPartland struggled for work, as did most of her peers. Unbowed, she began to write about jazz for *DownBeat* magazine, including the challenges specifically of being a woman in jazz. ("Play like a woman, she wrote. "There's nothing wrong with that at all.")

She became a powerful jazz advocate and an increasingly activist jazz educator. In 1969, she co-founded her own record label, Halcyon Records.

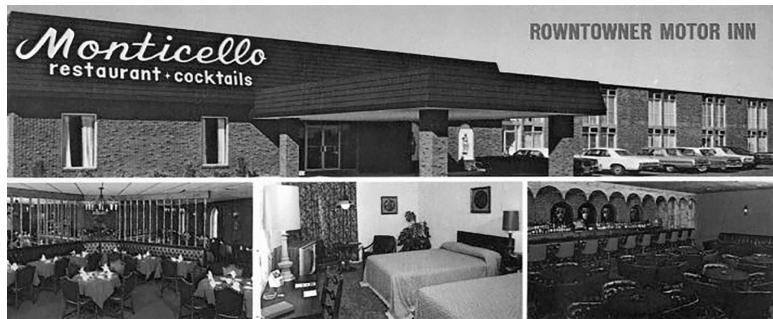
The International Art of Jazz was launched in 1959 out in Stony Brook, Long Island, by a group of North Shore residents "hungry for good music." A volunteer association initially, it grew into the first full-time, professional, non-profit organization for jazz in America, promoting concerts across the length and breadth of Long Island, and building a well-funded educational program for young people.

Marian McPartland played other IAJ concerts before this one at the Peninsula Public Library on Central Avenue in the town of Lawrence on December 10. Coincidentally, she had also, just that month, bought a house on Long Island.

The fact that this obscure afternoon of music was preserved at all is a tribute to Boris Rose, the prolific, eccentric, live-jazz recording enthusiast, who ventured beyond his usual Manhattan borders for a rare taping adventure out on the Island.

The library room is packed; you can hear it. There are kids down front, because their very young voices surface periodically, and Ms. McPartland at one point gently asks one of them to sit down.

Her set, with her regular trio — Joe Corsello on drums, Rusty Gilder on bass — proves extraordinarily wide-ranging, with a little something for everyone, commencing with a refined, lilting "Stella by Starlight;" a wonderfully rhapsodic "Willow Weep for Me," that inspires one or two audience members to clap along; and Dizzy Gillespie's "A Night in Tunisia" propelled by some hard-driving drumming from Joe Corsello. "She would



definitely play to her audience," Corsello recalled, in an interview for these notes. "She was like that. Whether it was children or adults. We used to do a lot of clinics for kids."

Ms. McPartland pauses after "A Night in Tunisia," acknowledging that she is trying to think of something to play for the young people down front. She comes up with "Raindrops Keep Fallin' on My Head," the Burt Bacharach-Hal David #1 hit from 1970, before pivoting to John Coltrane's avant tongue-twister, "Giant Steps," challenging her rapt young audience to keep up.

They do. The ovation is wildly appreciative. Ms. McPartland, who had just released a piano duet album entitled *Elegant Piano* on Halcyon, in tandem with the inimitable Teddy Wilson, unabashedly plugs this release before launching into something

from it that would become a staple of her repertoire, Toots Thielemans' "Bluesette." She reinvokes the contemporary pop moment with James Taylor's "Fire and Rain," taken at a simmering funk tempo. Just before calling intermission, she introduces "Close Your Eyes," a 1930s pop song by a forgotten American woman songwriter named Bernice Petkere, once dubbed "The Queen of Tin Pan Alley" by Irving Berlin. She then tosses a shout out to her host, the International Art of Jazz — "Long Island's only active jazz society," as she reminds her audience, while sign-up brochures are passed around.

The band comes back from the break with the blues, an elegantly turned "Things Ain't What They Used to Be," by Duke Ellington's son, Mercer Ellington, featuring an excellent extended Rusty Gilder bass solo. Jerome

Kern's "All the Things You Are" is rendered in the filigreed classical style of a Bach prelude;

Jobim's "How Insensitive" in strict bossa nova time. Requests for a ballad bring forth the



recent movie theme from "The Summer of '42." Miles Davis's "Milestones" is delivered as an up-tempo Joe Corsello drum showpiece.

Back in those days, "Corsello notes, "we played clubs for, like, six nights a week, plus a matinee on Sunday afternoons. We would go up to Rochester, NY, for a month to The Rowntowner Motor Inn; their Monticello



restaurant was a big jazz place. And we'd just play — every day, every night — grabbing every opportunity we could. So we got very tight. And we really got along, because Marian was just a sweetheart."

It is noteworthy that, within months of this Long Island library gig, the maestro of Manhattan supper club society, singer and pianist Bobby Short, turned over his Café Carlyle home in the Carlyle Hotel on Madison Avenue to Marian McPartland and her trio during his two-month winter vacation. This led to a long association for Marian McPartland with the Carlyle and its late-night neighbor in the hotel, Bemelmans Bar.

The McPartland trio next eases into a sinuous "Satin Doll" at the library, followed by "Here's That Rainy Day," beautifully enunciated with pianistic eloquence. For their penultimate

number, Ms. McPartland returns to her Jimmy McPartland "trad jazz" roots on the venerable Original Dixieland Jazz Band chestnut, "Royal Garden Blues." She then closes out her "Concert in the Library" with a request from one of her hipper young audience members for Thelonious Monk's "Straight, No Chaser," experimentally explored with spaced out solos all around. A brief sign-off tag ("like in a nightclub," McPartland murmurs) on Sonny Rollins' "Oleo," and this very fleeting moment in jazz history is over and done.

But not gone.

—BARRY SINGER
New York City, 2024

