

Goddesses Among Us!

<https://rhodetour.org/items/show/434>

Interview with Mary Ann Rossoni, Recorded: August 28, 2024, Digital Recorder
Summary Written by Mev Miller / Edited by Staff at Rhode Island Humanities

In 2000, Thayer Dietrich, a member of the Rhode Island LGBT Pride Committee, suggested a performance to raise funds for Pride events while showcasing the talents of local Lesbian musicians. Mary Ann Rossoni, a musician herself, joined the efforts and together they produced the first Goddess Show at the Avon Cinema in Providence. At this sit-down event, the audience of 200 (predominantly Lesbians) enjoyed the sounds of Lesbian solo and group acts singing in a variety of genres. Some songs were original pieces by the musicians themselves. The Goddess Show proved successful both in fundraising and in elevating the visibility of Lesbian artists within the Lesbian community.

In those days, for many, it was still too threatening to be out due to professional, family, and other community concerns. The performers were not ashamed of being Lesbian but worried about the repercussions. In the initial show, only Mary Ann Rossoni and Laura Berkson were formally out as Lesbians. The Goddess Show, therefore, became an opportunity for Lesbian musicians to perform for a supportive audience. More importantly, their music could be heard and appreciated. They initially volunteered their performances, though Mary Ann, who believed musicians should always be paid for working, did insist they receive small stipends.

The Goddess Show offered a rare and unique opportunity for both Lesbian performers and audiences. While many of the event's performers remained "closeted" for some years, the Goddess Show created a much-needed space for Lesbians to perform and for women to be together in a welcoming women-centered space. Generally, the musicians did not perform music with strong Lesbian themes, but there definitely were undertones of women's love for each other.

Lesbian musicians, especially if they were out, had limited opportunity to establish broader audiences. Generally, they were underrepresented in most music venues. This was true even for most LGBTQ Pride events as well. Ironically, though these women would have "their night" at the Goddess Show and raised significant (and much needed) funds for Pride events, they weren't usually invited to perform on the main stages at RI Pride events (a few were, sure, but those performances were generally very limited).

Andy Smith, a writer for the Providence Journal, interviewed Mary Ann about the event in 2001. Unfortunately, the headline read something like "a Rhode Island Pride event." So, several residents of RI, not really aware of the meaning of Pride in those days, mistakenly thought the show was music about proudly living in Rhode Island. What a shock for them when they entered a room filled with 100+ Lesbians and heard the sounds of women musicians not really singing about Rhode Island!

Mary Ann Rossoni planned and organized the Goddess Show for nearly 13 years. She set up the musicians, created the schedule, and generally kept things moving while a crew of volunteers would assist with many other tasks. Over time, The Goddess Show shifted from a sit-down event

into a more “club” type atmosphere (for example, at the Hi-Hat Club at Providence’s Davol Square). As more people got involved, the acts started to include a broader array of performers. The annual Goddess Shows still continue today, though the focus has changed and it no longer highlights or includes only Lesbian performers.

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