





GODDESSES & GRATITUDE

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god-dess (god'is) *n.* 1. a female god 2. a greatly adored woman 3. A woman of great charms 4. A female being of supernatural powers or attributes, believed in and worshiped by a people; often believed to be the source of life 5. An image of a female supernatural being; an idol 6. A woman of great beauty or grace.

R.I. PRIDE God-dess (prid god'is) *n.* 1. all of the above 2. a divinely gifted female musician or devoted listener who offers her talents and time, in person or in spirit, to the ongoing efforts of R.I. Pride thus bringing awareness to all, through music, that the GLBTQ community is alive, well and a truly vital asser to *all* communities in the state of Rhode Island.

In spring of 2000, Thayer Dietrick, a member of the R.I. Pride Committee, suggested a novel fundraising idea: to promote a benefit concert for R.I. Pride featuring performances by lesbians in our community. The first annual event, the **Goddess Show**, held at the Avon Cinema on a tempestuous rainy afternoon in Providence, was an absolute smashing success. Over 200 lesbians and their friends were in attendance and Pride benefited greatly from their contributions. In addition, the performers were truly grateful to share their music with a full house of devoted listeners.

Prior to that performance, the 90's had been an awkward time for lesbian performers wanting to work the local and national stages. Many were struggling with what the consequences of being gay identified might be—if not in their private lives, most definitely in their professional lives. I remember being called by Andy Smith, staff music writer at **The Providence Journal**, prior to the 2001 Goddess Show. Surprisingly, he wanted to cover the story and promote the show. How wonderful, right? He began asking questions about the show and its players and then asked if he could put into print that all of the performers were lesbians. There was a noteworthy and lengthy pause before my response. Actually, some deep, emotional munitions surfaced as I replied, "Well, I am, but let's just say the other performers are in support of equal rights for gays and lesbians." Although that may have sounded like a weak response, that long pause before answering gave me ample time to seriously question the impact of an honest answer. No matter how my heart wanted to sing out our professional and personal praises, answering unreservedly would have meant outing my peers.

After the interview, I called a few Goddess performers. Most were in agreement; they just weren't ready to let the world know. They worried about losing their jobs; they wondered what their families would think when the time-honored Providence Journal reported it. Some had not come out yet to their parents, family, friends and co-workers. Professionally, they worried about being blacklisted from performance opportunities. The performers were not ashamed to divulge their sexual orientation; they were frightened by the outcome. Besides, they identified themselves as women performers. Being lesbian just clearly defined whom they chose to love. Even though much of what they sang was music by women for women, their music had universal themes pertaining to all. Why, then, couldn't their MUSIC be the Journal's story?



Sonia of Disappear Fear plays to a Santa Cruz audience

During the 80's, singer/songwriter Cheryl Wheeler was secretly the most noted lesbian singer/songwriter in eastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island, yet she was not out to the community at large. She flew under the gaydar—not posing as straight (as some did), but certainly not flying her rainbow flag high. She was not alone. Most lesbian singer/songwriters did not bring their home lives to the stage. They just wanted to play music. Their main concern was to be signed to a major music label, not to BE labeled! Recently, during one of her local performances, Cheryl spoke proudly of her marriage to Cathleen and what marriage meant to them. Looking back on that time, the only Rhode Island performer who was out in the 80s was singer/songwriter and educator Laura Berkson. Now living in Iowa, Laura is still singing and recording and is also a Cantorial Soloist, youth advisor and choir director at Temple B'nai Jeshurun.)

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



R.I. PRIDE Goddess Commit

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Kristi Martel 2006



Kathy "Little Bit" 2006



Terry Wood 2006



Becky Chace Jennifer Minuto



Codi Nelson
2006



Mary Day belting it out at the Goddess Show 2006 at Hi-Hat

Now, many years later, that awkward sexual identity veil has been lifted. Thanks to performers such as Phranc, an influential and androgynous trail-blazer for the Queercore movement; LGBT activists and folk rock duo the Indigo Girls; and more recently Melissa Ferrick, out to her fans since 1995, lesbian performers can take the heat, if any, concerning their sexuality. Scores of gay and lesbian troubadours have become role models and mentors for many young performers and listeners. The times may have changed, but not without the grand efforts of national and local organizations such as R.I. Pride and more recently, MERI. These organizations have ceaselessly rallied to battle homophobia and ultimately change what the straight community thinks about their LGB family, friends and neighbors. R.I. Pride Goddesses will continue to carry the torch, sing our songs and spread the message of equality!

Please join Goddess co-chairs Mary Ann Rossoni and Tanya Douglas, along with the Goddess committee members Claudia Summer, Toni Salisbury (DJ, "Voice of Women", WRIU) and Rodney Davis (Chair, R.I. Pride) for the 8th Annual Goddess Show. It promises to be the unsurpassable "who's who" lesbian event of the year. All proceeds benefit R.I. Pride. This year's much anticipated meritorious event will feature: D.J. Dena; Boston comic, Amy Tee; performers Laura Wood, Marcy Lang, Heather Rose and the Dramas, Emily Smith and Synergy, BellaMinx Burly-Q, and nationally known performer Sonia with Disappear Fear.

Doors open at 4:30pm at the Hi Hat, 3 Davol Square, Providence on Sunday, April 15, 2007. Tickets in advance of the day of the show are \$20, or \$25 at the door. To reserve your tickets, call 467.2130 or e-mail info@prideri.com