

Love of music emanates from village Blue Room

'Joyful, artistic, soulful place,' a dream come true for Jen Minuto



HE JOINED RIGHT IN: Cranston Mayor Ken Hopkins didn't wait for an invitation to join Jen Minuto at the keyboard when she and her wife, Kasey Minuto opened the Blue Room in Pawtuxet on Memorial Day weekend.

(BEACON COMMUNICATIONS PHOTOS)



By DANA RICHIE

When Jen Minuto sat down at a piano for the first time she was five years old. (I) "fell in love and it felt like I was home," she says.

Now, she's sharing her love of all things musical with the Pawtuxet Village in her newly opened piano bar and jazz club, the Blue Room.

The space, complete with a piano, drumkit, sound system, full bar, white leather booths and dark blue mood lighting, opened on Memorial Day Weekend and is open from 4 p.m. to 12 a.m. on Wednesday and Thursday, 4 p.m. to 1 a.m. on Friday and Saturday and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday. So far, Jen Minuto said that creating this “joyful, artistic, soulful place” has been a “dream come true.”

“One point in the weekend, I was sitting outside and I could look inside and see old, young, gay, straight, Black, white, women, men, musicians and non-musicians all smiling, happy, hanging out in the room, and I literally sat back and started to cry and thought this has to be what heaven looks like,” Jen said.

In addition to serving craft cocktails, Jen deliberately “curates a music schedule” to provide “an eclectic mix of music” each night. She’s already booked out some consistent slots: the John Allmark Jazz Quartet performs on Wednesdays from 8-11, Thursdays from 5-8 pm are Blue Room Open Mic Nights, and the Blue Room Horns play Thursday from 8-11. She said that a lot of talented musicians have already reached out to perform in the space that she describes was designed to really “spoil the musicians.”

“I wanted this to make a musician’s room by and for musicians,” Jen said. “Every careful detail was made with the intention of how it’s going to feel for the musicians to be here, knowing that if the room makes musicians feel inspired and happy, then everyone who comes in to experience the music will feel inspired and happy.”

Kasey Minuto, Jen’s wife and the trumpet player in their 6-piece band, Jen Minuto and the Better Angels, recalled that one of their first dates was right down the street from where the Blue Room is now.

“She said to me that day that she always dreamed about opening a music club,” Kasey added.

“It’s a beautiful thing,” Kasey said. “It’s this little jewel box room. It’s very intimate. I can’t wait to play there myself and experience the audience as a musician in that room.”

Joe Grady, friend and guitarist for Jen Minuto and the Better Angels, said it was a “labor of love” to equip the Blue Room stage with lighting and a sound system so that “musicians want to play there.” He recalled that when his wife told him about the space opening up in the Village, he immediately thought of Jen.

“Jen had the energy and time and savings and the vision to really go for it and create what became the Blue Room,” Grady said. “She’s been wanting to open a place like this for many years, and really, everything came together to make it possible.”

Jen, who grew up in East Greenwich, has always had a passion for music. She started playing her first gigs before she could drive, and she performed at night while attending URI. After completing her undergraduate education, she went to graduate school for social policy and creative writing at Goddard College, all while continuing to play music full time. While in her 20s, she lived in Edgewood with her grandmother and kept playing.

“I would play music at night,” Jen said. “Sometimes the gigs started at nine or ten, and my 90-year-old grandmother would get dressed and say ‘I’m coming with you.’ She would come out and hear me play, and it was wonderful.”

Jen moved to New York City in 2001 to pursue a career in music as both a jazz piano player and singer songwriter, releasing her first record, “Made in Voyage” later that year. She moved back to Rhode Island the following year because she missed her family and her grandmother had passed away.

“I will always come home to Edgewood, to Pawtuxet Village,” Jen said. “Always. We live in such a special place. There isn’t a more special place to live in the state of Rhode Island than this village.”

Even while Jen was the director of the Jewish Seniors Agency, attending law school or practicing civil rights law, she always made space for playing and cultivating music in the community.

In 2006, she owned and operated Village Sounds, providing music lessons to children and adults in the neighborhood. When she bought her “first and only home” on Bluff Avenue in 2007, she started teaching lessons from her home. She taught music for approximately 15 years, all while continuing to make and perform her own music – releasing a record in both 2008 and 2019– and working a full-time job.

She sees the Blue Room as an extension of her desire to bring more music into the village. Jen said that during the pandemic she turned 50 and realized she needed to “balance her life and have more music.”

“About a year ago, I started recalibrating, rebalancing,” Jen said. “Then this space came open and I remembered what my dad said: ‘Jenny, Jenny we should open our own place.’”

The pieces fell into place. She said she was fully committed to the venture when she purchased the website domain theblueroom.com (<http://www.theblueroom.com>).

Without even realizing it at the time they were brainstorming names, she inadvertently referenced a lyric from a song she had written years ago.

“I actually wrote about the blue room,” Jen said.

Since opening, Jen said she has received overwhelming support from the community. Local business owners like Stephanie Read, the owner and operations manager of Fellini’s Pizzeria and Cafe, are “extremely excited about this addition to the community.” She said that the Blue Room provides a “niche that needed to be filled here” with consistent live music and extended hours.

“I just went in hoping and believing that I wasn’t the only one who needed a space like this and who needed more music,” Jen said. “Everyone who has come in from the Village is so excited because they’re like this is exactly what we needed.”