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The day the music didn't die

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In a recent column I confessed that I naively believed I would continue to play music on a part-time basis, and practice law part time, after I took the bar exam.

If the first 30 years of my career serve as any reasonable indicator, this just has not worked out.

I returned to Rochester enthused about the music community. As you know, many students decide to make Rochester their home after graduating from the Eastman School of Music. Then I watched Don Potter establish "The Music Room" in the Rochester Club.

He enlisted the help of some of the most outstanding musicians I have ever seen perform, including Mark Manetta, Oliver and Ed Zak. Since alcohol was not served, the show usually went until 4 a.m. Virtually every Friday and Saturday night I could literally walk from my apartment on East Avenue to the Rochester Club to enjoy one of the most exhilarating music experiences of my life.

I think I can honestly say it was the closest thrill I ever achieved related to music, of course, except for the I actually performed on stage. The fact that the ballroom that Potter remade into "The Music Room" was the place where I practiced drums just made it all the more interesting to me.

This community is home to one of the greatest, if not the greatest, music schools in the world. The Eastman also has had more than four decades in which to brag that it is the home of John Beck, the greatest percussion professor in the known universe. Beck happened to teach Steve Gadd — if you don't know who Steve Gadd is, please stop reading this column at once.

Until recently, I really didn't think I'd be able to practice entertainment law in Rochester. The Internet has changed that forever, thankfully. Although an elite group of musicians everywhere knew about the Eastman, my hopes for true world recognition of our contribution to music, and Rochester becoming a musical epicenter of the world, mostly were nothing more than pure optimism until the birth of the Rochester International Jazz Festival. Even the New York Times considers our city among the top four, along with Newport, R.I., New York City and San Francisco.



There are numerous development projects underway today that will bring many residents back downtown. I can't help but remember how wonderful it was to be able to walk down East Avenue for a few minutes to arrive at a great entertainment venue. The resurgence also continues in our music community, thanks to John Nugent and Mark Iacona.

Nugent also is famous for the Montreaux Festival in Switzerland and many other successful musical ventures around the world. Even better is the fact that he has chosen to move to Rochester. Although he travels all over the world, this is where he would like to live and raise his children.

If you took a moment to watch Nugent play the saxophone, you could see the enthusiasm he has, along with his incredible music talent. He was great once again this year. I also watched Beck perform with his group, and he, too, was outstanding.

Of course, thanks to the Rochester Plaza, we have the greatest jam sessions imaginable every night of the festival. The Rochester Plaza helps the festival with so much that I am told Jazz Fest wouldn't be here if it weren't for them.

Anyway, Jazz Fest has become one of the most prestigious festivals in the world. I can walk down Jazz Street and see thousands of music enthusiasts visit one fantastic venue after another. I watched our mayor introduce Boz Scaggs in a way that made the Eastman crowd roar. When he said he has "Lido Shuffle" and "Dirty Low Down" on his ipod, you just know he's got to be about as hip as any mayor in the United States. (Yes, I still use the word "hip" occasionally — so sue me.)

Although I miss Boston, I thank God I moved back to Rochester, and I am especially thankful for the RIJF. Every year the festival has more to offer than the Village ever does. Don't miss it next year. John and Mark, keep up the great work and thanks!

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