

## HEALTH &amp; WELL-BEING

Music therapist Brianna LePage works with client John Samuelson in his Buzzards Bay home. Brianna helped John's late wife, Jean, regain some quality of life during her battle with Alzheimer's. Music accesses a portion of the brain that is the last to be affected by the ravages of dementia. John wrote the framed piano composition for Jean during their courtship. Music was - and still is - a huge part of the Samuelson family's public and private life.



RON SCHLOERB/CAPE COD TIMES

# MUSIC THERAPY

‘Music has charms to soothe a savage breast’

– William Congreve, 1670-1729

BY BARBARA RAVAGE

Think of it as a love story set to music. John and Jean Samuelson were music students at Boston University when they met back in the late 1930s. Their marriage lasted 64 years, until Jean's death in May 2009. There's no question they made beautiful music together, and as musicians and teachers, they bestowed the gift of music on family, friends, and their community. It is fitting that music brought glimmers of light to Jean's last years, as Alzheimer's disease (AD) dimmed her mind, and has been a solace to John since her passing.

John and Jean were instrumental in forming the Hingham Civic Orches-

tra (now the Atlantic Symphony) in 1946. Jean played violin while John was the conductor. Over the years, he served as a church choir director and organist at a succession of houses of worship in Hingham, where he and Jean raised their family: Janet, who divides her time between Georgia and Orleans; Judy, who lives in New Jersey; and Joanne, who lives in Wareham and works in the medical records department at Falmouth Hospital.

But, John says with a wry smile, he had to keep busy, so the Hull native also worked as a bus driver for the Nantasket Transportation Company, as an officer in the Hingham Police Department, and in the Scituate school system as music director as

#### About the author

Barbara Ravage moved to Cape Cod from her native New York City in 2000, after the youngest of her children went off to college. She considers heavy doses of ocean air and Cape light the best cure for empty nest syndrome. A graduate of Barnard College, she is the author of nine books, including a biography of Rachel Carson for middle-school students and "Burn Unit: Saving Lives After the Flames," which explores the history and science of burn treatment. She balances her writing life with yoga, karate, and pottery. After years of making do with two summer weeks on the Cape, her favorite part about living here is that she's already home.

PLEASE SEE **MUSIC**, PAGE 17

# Music

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

well as a math and science teacher. He served as superintendent of schools in Hingham, then returned to teaching in Scituate until he retired in 1980.

Jean, meanwhile, taught music in Hingham, where she was conductor of the junior high orchestra and glee club, and traveled between elementary schools as the town's sole music teacher.

Even as a tinkerer, John's energies turned to music. In the 1960s, he bought an enormous old movie house organ that time had passed by, then restored and installed it at home. The pipes crowded the basement, with the keyboard console in the living room upstairs.

For vacations, the whole family would pile into the old passenger bus John had fitted out with beds and a camp kitchen, complete with stove and refrigerator. Later they were founding members of the Family Motor Coach Association, continuing to take to the open road when school was out.

After they retired, John and Jean moved to Sarasota, traveling north in their motor home to visit their daughters and grandchildren. After Jean developed AD, they returned to Massachusetts in 2005, and it was in Cape Cod Nursing Home that she first encountered Brianna LePage.

Trained as a music therapist at Berklee College of Music, Brianna was working as activities assistant at the nursing home. She ran a morning music therapy session for a group of about 15 residents. Brianna recalls that Jean came every day, and though her dementia was quite advanced, she would always join in the singing.

For people with dementia and other memory disorders, music seems to tap into areas of the brain unaltered by their disease. Petr Janata, a cognitive neuroscientist at University of California, Davis, has found that music activates the medial pre-frontal cortex, one of the last regions of the brain to lose function in AD. Research has established a broad range of therapeutic effects of listening to music, singing songs, and even playing – from

## Quickhits

### WebLinks

Brianna LePage, music therapist specializing in dementia, Alzheimer's disease, and hospice care  
508-681-8414 (Please call before 7 p.m.)  
<http://musicasmedicine.synthasite.com>

Institute for Music and Neurologic Function  
[www.bethabe.org/Music\\_Therapy213.html](http://www.bethabe.org/Music_Therapy213.html)

drums and other simple percussion instruments to more complex instruments the patient may have played before the illness took over. Music therapy can help people regardless of whether they have musical skills or training. According to Brianna, it may delay memory loss and in some cases improve memory as well as fine and gross motor skills. It fosters social engagement and is helpful in managing moods, especially "sundowning," the agitation many AD patients experience at the end of the day.

In her work with Jean, Brianna observed that even though she often forgot words when she was speaking, "She could sing everything. We would look through music books together and she would tell me what songs she wanted to sing, and we would sing together." Brianna had one-on-one therapy sessions with Jean, gradually reintroducing her to reading music and playing the piano.

A musical prodigy herself, Brianna plays clarinet, saxophone, violin, guitar, piano, and, she says, "a bit of flute, a bit of trumpet." She has a lovely singing voice and writes songs as well. She began playing violin when she was three and piano at age five. Even as a small child, she would bring her violin along to play for the patients when visiting her grandmother, who worked as a dietary supervisor at a nursing home. She told her mother, a music teacher in Provincetown's

PLEASE SEE **MUSIC**, PAGE 18

“  
I want to help  
people with my  
music.”

BRIANNA LEPAGE,  
MUSIC THERAPIST



**Lahti & Lahti, P.C.**  
ESTATE PLANNING & ELDER LAW



- ◆ *Wills, Trusts & Estate Planning*
- ◆ *Health Care Proxy*
- ◆ *Durable Power of Attorney*
- ◆ *Probate*
- ◆ *Estate Administration*
- ◆ *Family Partnerships*
- ◆ *Estate Tax Issues*
- ◆ *Estate Tax Planning*
- ◆ *Medicaid Planning*
- ◆ *Medicaid Applications*
- ◆ *Guardianships*
- ◆ *Charitable Planning*

#### SOUTHCOAST OFFICE

800 PURCHASE STREET  
SUITE 420  
NEW BEDFORD, MA 02740  
PH 508.992.8677  
FX 508.992.8678

#### CAPE COD OFFICE

72 MAIN STREET  
SUITE 5  
WEST HARWICH, MA 02671  
PH 508.430.8677  
FX 508.992.8678

**WWW.LAHTILAW.COM**

*Licensed in MA, RI, FL & IL.*

*Michael T. Lahti is a Certified Elder Law Attorney by the National Elder Law Foundation.*

# PRIME TIME DINING GUIDE

## YARMOUTH

### THE YARMOUTH HOUSE RESTAURANT

Enjoy our extensive menu and excellent service for lunch or dinner ...the Waterwheel Room creates a calm, peaceful dining experience in which to enjoy our white linen service. Sundays our specials include "Ted's Famous Turkey Special" for \$12.95 (served all day) roasted turkey, apple-sage stuffing, pan gravy, mashed potatoes & butternut squash! Open 7 days a week for your dining pleasure. Come in and enjoy the "wonder" of our fabulous decor, timed to celebrate the seasons and holidays!

335 Rte. 28, West Yarmouth  
508-771-5154

## WEST YARMOUTH

### DI PARMA, ITALIAN TABLE

Classic Italian Cuisine, Authentic Neopolitan Pizza.... A real taste of Tuscany! All on Route 28 in West Yarmouth. DiParma, Italian Table joins the family of Yarmouth restaurants owned by the Kounadis family who created The Yarmouth House 30 years ago. Affordable and Fun. Lunch and Dinner 11:30 am-10 pm everyday. Lounge 'til 1 am. Pizza & Appetizers 'til Mignight!

175 Route 28, West Yarmouth  
508-771-7776  
www.diparmarestaurant.com

## EASTHAM

**MESSINA** la taverna della famiglia Messina in Eastham is all about the family. From the greeting when you walk in the door to the tag line of the restaurant, "la taverna della famiglia," the feeling is that you have been at Messina for years. Spectacular Italian specialties including hot & cold antipasti, zuppe, insalata, frittatas, paninis, risotto, pastas and numerous Italian classics are all individually created using the highest quality of the freshest ingredients. Owner, Jim Russo's family recipes are simply prepared in the Italian tradition, and most humbly priced for everyone's pleasure making frequent return visits to Messina an easy choice. That feeling continues at the bar at Messina. Share premium martinis or a selection from our solid wine list with your friends. Or try your luck with keno while enjoying a wide-screen sport broadcast and our weekend entertainment lineup. Spectacular foods, sexy wines, good friends both old and new, Cape Cod; these are the ingredients for the life worth living! This is why everyone is saying "Meet me at Messina!" Open year round from 11:30 AM. Major credit cards accepted.

4100 State Hwy, Eastham  
508-247-0360  
www.messinaofeastham.com

Please call Sean Randall at 508-862-1376 to Advertise in the Primetime Dining Guide

# Music

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

elementary and high schools, "I want to help people with my music." That is what she has been doing for nearly a decade.

After graduating from Provincetown High School in 1995, she studied violin performance at the Hartt School of Music, then went on to Berklee's renowned music therapy program. An internship brought her to the Institute for Music and Neurologic Function at Beth Abraham in the Bronx, where famed neurologist Oliver Sacks and Concetta Tomaino have long worked on "advancing scientific inquiry on music and the brain and developing clinical treatments ... to restore, maintain and improve the physical, emotional and neurologic functioning in people who have been debilitated through stroke, trauma, dementia, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's and other processes through the systematic use of music." Brianna's interest in geriatric patients was deepened by her work with Tomaino.

When Jean's condition worsened, she was moved to Bourne Manor. By then she and Brianna had forged an intimate connection and her family had come to rely on the benefits music therapy brought to Jean's quality of life. When Joanne asked if she would work with Jean one-on-one, as her private music therapist, Brianna took it on as a full-time job. She would spend mornings with Jean, then pick up John and the three would have lunch together. Afterwards, with John at the piano and Brianna on violin, all three would sing songs. "My main goal for Jean was for her to play violin again," Brianna recalls, "and we were almost at that point. I helped her to hold the violin again, to use her fingers on the strings and hold the bow. She was even starting to move the bow along the strings." Sadly, Jean died shortly afterward.

Brianna and Joanne were with her when she passed, listening to music and holding hands. Brianna was honored to be able to play Jean's beloved violin at the funeral.

Since then, Brianna has been working with John. One or two days a week, she visits with him. She makes him lunch and they talk, about music and life. She plays the piano, often asking for his advice on her technique. Or they'll play piano and violin duets. It may be therapy, but it looks like friendship, companionship, a student and mentor, two music lovers connecting at a point of deep experience.

Joanne sometimes joins them with her cello, an instrument she played as a child and has recently resumed studying. "When my mom died, something came over me, and I began to play again," she says. "I have many happy childhood memories of people coming to our home, singing along

with my mother and father while he played the organ. Creating new memories with music and sharing it with others in this stage of life is just as important now as it was back then. I think my dad gets a sense of purpose, creativity, involvement, and it's also good for his motor skills when he plays piano."

In addition to doing music therapy with children in a bereavement group under the auspices of the VNA, Brianna works privately, one on one, with

older clients, whether they are in a nursing home, assisted living facility, or like John, live independently.

John sits in an easy chair in the light-filled front room of his house overlooking the Cape Cod Canal, while Brianna practices a particularly challenging passage from Johann Sebastian Bach on John's Valdesta digital piano. He suggests she change the setting to add the sound of string instruments, then switch over to organ – the piano transforms itself like magic. The walls are hung with family photographs and other memorabilia of a life well lived. The framed, hand-written manuscript of "Impromptu for Jean," a piano composition John wrote during their courtship, hangs in a place of honor next to the piano. John settles back, his eyes closed, humming along in reverie, at times his fingers moving as though he were at the keyboard, at others his right hand keeping tempo, the choir director and music conductor alive and well, thanks to the power of music.

**For people with dementia and other memory disorders, music seems to tap into areas of the brain unaltered by their disease.**



## TRANS-ATLANTIC MOTORS

25 FALMOUTH ROAD, HYANNIS, MA  
SALES 508-775-4526  
SERVICE & PARTS 508-775-4526



Mercedes-Benz



WWW.TAMCARS.COM