

Grant MacEwan Community College Oral History Project

Interviewee: Julie Mahendran

Interviewer: Valla McLean

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VM: This is an interview for the Grant MacEwan Community College oral history project on March 27th, 2019, with Julie Mahendran. This is Valla McLean in Edmonton, Alberta, and Julie is in Toronto, Ontario. I'd like to start with asking, what did you study at the community college, and when?

JM: I was a student in the music diploma program. I believe it was called at the time. It was a two-year diploma program. I completed it. I was there from [19]95 to [19]97.

VM: And what made you want to attend Grant MacEwan Community College?

JM: I wanted to study music - vocal voice as an instrument. I was interested primarily in jazz. Having grown up in Edmonton and that's where my family lived. It was the most logical place to study, and I'd heard that Grant MacEwan had a great program for music and with a focus in jazz as opposed to classical voice that sort of thing which is more the norm in terms of post-secondary education. So that's why I chose Grant MacEwan.

VM: Can you name the campus you attended, and describe what it was like?

JM: Yes, I attended the big orange building in the West End, which is now defunct, I understand. It was a great experience. I was trying to think of what my first recollections would have been, and I don't recall exactly, but when I think of the building, I do think of it as a very eclectic construction with a very homey feel. In the music area where we were, there were some comfy sofas to gather around and discuss things and hang out. That's what I recall.

VM: And what were some of your favourite classes, and why did you enjoy those?

JM: I think my ensemble class were some of my favourites which was basically a class where you're almost preparing a song and singing it in a different style every week. It opened me to the breadth of what types of performances in music that was out there for me to perform and explore. Another one was my harmony classes. I really enjoyed those and getting to understand more about jazz music theory. I'd had classical piano lessons, and so I had some of that music theory background, but I found that the jazz approach was very different. It really hooked me more than the classical side of things. It helped me to understand the theory behind music a lot better.

VM: What about some of your favourite instructors, their names, and why you liked them?

JM: My private instructor while I was there was definitely one of my favourites. Her name is Chanelle Rimmer. I believe she's still there, to my knowledge. She had a similar voice type to me. She'd been through the Grant MacEwan program and to Berkeley, which is where I ultimately went as well to finish my Bachelor's of Music - she probably had an influence on that. We just kind of hit it off personally as well. She taught me a lot about how to develop my voice into the way that I wanted it to be as a vocalist. Another instructor that I have to mention is Rick Garn, who was certainly - ear training I took with him as a formal class, but then I did some extracurricular activities with him as well. I spent a little more time with him as a leader. It was very positive and influential, as well.

VM: Can you tell me about some of the on-campus activities you might have participated in?

JM: Yes, one of those was with Rick. I auditioned for and became a part of the Showcase Band as they called it then which I don't know if they still do. Which is an extracurricular - they had two Showcase Bands - their function was to give some of the students an experience of being in a working band, preparing repertoire, and performing it. We got the opportunity to represent the college at certain functions or get some formal experience - yes, various ways of promoting the college. Whether it be on local TV stations or at performances at campuses and even off-campus sometimes. I also auditioned for the part of the Big Band for a year. That was an amazing experience. It was a joint project with the University of Alberta and the conductor there, Ray Baril. He's still around I'm not sure if he is retiring or getting close to it. He was also a wonderful mentor, and I learned a lot being able to – it was my first time performing with a band that size, fifteen horn players plus a rhythm section. It was quite exciting.

VM: When you look back at your time spent at the community college, what are some of the best experiences that you that you take away from that?

JM: I think it's definitely some of those performances and learning experiences with those two bands that I was part of. It was really developing my skills and technique as a musician. It was also the friendships that I made there; those were probably one of the number one things that I can think of. It was my second go around. I'd already studied a different subject at post-secondary, so this time it was something I was really passionate about, and I was really focused, so I definitely immersed myself a lot more in the program in getting to know my peers and spending time with them. There was a lot

of projects that we worked on together, so it was a great bonding experience for all of us.

VM: And looking back, what are some of your proudest achievements during your time at the community college?

JM: I think being a part of those two bands was a great achievement for me because obviously, not everyone could be in them, so I consider myself very lucky. Also, my final recital was quite an achievement because it was an accumulation of all my studies all put into this one hour of music that I had arranged and programmed and rehearsed and publicized. It was a preview for what life as a working musician, a solo artist would be like. That was really cool.

VM: This is the last question of the interview. This is your opportunity if I failed to ask you anything that you were hoping to share, but I just haven't given you the chance to do.

JM: I guess there was one other experience that will definitely be a highlight -two experiences I guess I could share. The Big Band was doing a performance with a guest vocalist from the United States in a festival I believe in Banff, or it could have been in Edmonton. I don't remember now. She had some amazing charts for them to learn, and as a vocalist, I got to rehearse them with the band, and I believe maybe even preview them in a performance or two. The music was challenging but actually a joy to learn. Then also the Showcase Band got the opportunity to go and perform at an event in Banff just after I graduated. It was a great experience, again another bonding experience with the band being able to perform in what felt like a very professional

situation and just watch everyone step up to the occasion and have a great time doing it.

VM: I'd like to thank you very much, Julie, for participating in this Grant MacEwan Community College oral history project.

JM: My pleasure.

[End of interview]

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