

## The Jazz Singer: Sue Giles Has Landed, Right in Our Own Backyard

by Richard J. Skelly

**S**ince she made her trans-Hudson voyage from her Park Slope, Brooklyn, railroad flat with her two children to Hamilton in 2005, good things have been happening to jazz and blues vocalist Sue Giles. Over the summer, she took over as school director at the Trenton Community Music School. A single mother, she says she met a “wonderful” man in Trenton earlier this year, Anthony Ferron, an artist and musician, and she’s joyful about it, “because this is the first time I’ve ever met somebody who is so on the money.” Her gigs at the Salt Creek Grille in Princeton Forrester Village have been well attended; she’s also performed at newer venues in Trenton.

“There is a renaissance that is happening in Trenton, and for me too,” Giles says in a telephone interview on a recent Wednesday after one of her gigs at the Salt Creek Grille, where she will appear also on Wednesday, November 28. She also appears at Gallery 125’s holiday party in Trenton on Wednesday, December 12.

Giles was born in 1964 and raised in an arts and music-conscious household in Queens. Her mother was an art teacher, and has since died, and her father is still working as an architect.

The 1960s “were a great time to be a kid in New York,” says Giles, who has been singing since she was three. “It was a really charmed place at that time. Life was definitely interesting, and I grew up around a huge family, and it was one of the last really big families I knew about. As the seventh of seven children, I really have a lot of vision and a lot of hope.”

Growing up in Queens, she says, “my mother always had music on in the house. She listened to big bands and a lot of Ella Fitzgerald, Tony Bennett, Frank Sinatra, or she’d play WNEW-AM, or WRVR-FM as well, which was a jazz outlet until it went off the air in the early 1980s.

“In contrast to the music that my mother introduced us to, my father was a big Broadway music person,” Giles continues, “and when we were little, he would play us the Broadway soundtracks. I learned how to harmonize with my brothers and sisters without even realizing what I was doing.”

**Giles has pursued two successful careers simultaneously — as an administrative manager and as a jazz singer.**

**S**he says an early memory was hearing “The Sound of Music” on the family stereo in the living room, “and when I was three or four, singing into the TV antenna.”

Giles’s 2005 move to Hamilton was precipitated by her taking a job in administrative management at Marketing NPV off of Alexander Road. Previously in New York Giles worked in various jobs in an upper level administrative capacity, including as an assistant to Peter Gelb at Sony Music’s classical division. At the time, the label had a

huge hit with Celine Dion’s “My Heart Will Go On,” from the “Titanic” soundtrack. She also worked as an executive assistant to the president of Coach, the leather goods manufacturer.

Giles attended Fredonia State in upstate New York as a theater major. A classmate, trumpet player Joe Magnarelli, is now well-known on New York City’s jazz club scene. She ran into Magnarelli again in Manhattan after they’d both been out of school a number of years, and he encouraged her regarding her wish to pursue a career as a jazz singer, one of the toughest things anyone can do.

Giles says her professional debut took place when she was several years out of college, in her mid-20s, with David Durrah on piano at St. Peter’s Church at 54th Street and Lexington Avenue in Manhattan. The church, long known as “the jazz church” holds many memorial services for jazz and blues musicians, as well as a long-running lunch-time concert series.

“When I was in high school, I thought I really wanted to be on Broadway,” she says. “I have a sister who’s a rather prominent actress and writer, Nancy Giles, she does commentary for CBS Sunday Morning.” But there came a point in my life when I decided that acting wasn’t something I wanted to continue with. At that time I got married and had children.”

After her marriage broke up in 1995, she says, “I put my music aside for a time while I was working at Sony. They were wonderful enough to sponsor a holiday choir for their employees.” After a num-



**All in a Day’s Work:** After Sue Giles’s former employer, Sony, sponsored a holiday choir and made a recording that included a solo by Giles, she used it as a demo CD to interest jazz club owners.

ber of years of doing the holiday choir, “they decided they were going to make a recording. The person in charge of the recording asked me if I would come in and record something solo.” She did, and was then able to take her demo CD around to various jazz club owners and managers.

At her November 28 appearance at Salt Creek Grille she will be accompanied by pianist Champion Fulton and bassist Joe Bussey. Giles will also appear at the Cape May Jazz Festival next year, April 18 through 20.

“It’s interesting that ever since I

landed here in Hamilton, all these wonderful opportunities have opened up for me, from the Salt Creek Grille to the Trenton Downtown Association to the Trenton Community Music School, all the way on to finding a new love. Needless to say, I’m really happy to be in Mercer County.”

**Sue Giles**, Wednesday, November 28, Salt Creek Grille, 1 Rockingham Road, Princeton Forrester Village.

Also, Trenton 2Nite’s Holiday Party, Friday, December 14, 6 to 9 p.m., Gallery 125, 125 Warren Street, Trenton.