

Community

Section B Thursday, August 6, 2015

A place where the kids are alright

Serendipity Café marks 20 years

BY BOB CANNON
STAFF WRITER

Friday, July 24, is another sunny summer evening in Montclair, and the Montclair High School Amphitheater is abuzz with musicians and teens milling about, many of them running wires, setting up guitars, amplifiers and other assorted musical gear. The occasion is the monthly concert held by Serendipity Café, which is now celebrating 20 years since its inception. The word "café" is a conceptual term, since the concerts rotate between the amphitheater, church basements and other locales. But the one constant has been Ed Carine, who was part of the founding group of Serendipity in 1995.

"They had an assembly at the high school and they asked the students what they would like," recalled Carine. "I'm not sure what motivated them, but the kids had been thinking about this idea, and they made Terry Bynum-Copeland stand up and say, 'What we want is a place to play music and listen to music for us. Not a bar, and no age restrictions.'

"So the community listened, and a bunch of people got together. They were supported by Parks & Recreation, Paul Ellis, Arts Council people, the police department, and just concerned citizens.

After a strong start, though, Serendipity's other founders had "burned out," according to Carine, and the cafe was all but finished by 1997. Carine's sons asked him to take the reins, and he readily agreed. "I wasn't doing it for my kids particularly," said Carine, "although they liked it. I was doing it because I thought it was an excellent thing."

MAKING MUSIC EVERYWHERE

Carine's involvement with music for teens goes beyond Serendipity. For 10 years he has also contributed his time, talent, equipment and sound expertise to Parents Who Rock. "I say this at every concert," said Parents



STAFF PHOTOS BY ADAM ANIK

Claire Parcells of Montclair, 14, sings lead vocals with the band Tula Vera at the Serendipity Cafe series of concerts, poetry readings and other forms of artistic expression for teens on Friday night, July 24, at Montclair High School amphitheater.



As daylight fades, Tula Vera begins their performance under the spotlights.

Who Rock founder Alma Schneider, "that Parents Who Rock could not exist without him, because you have to have sound, you have to have equipment, and people who are willing to do it and volunteer. So we give a small

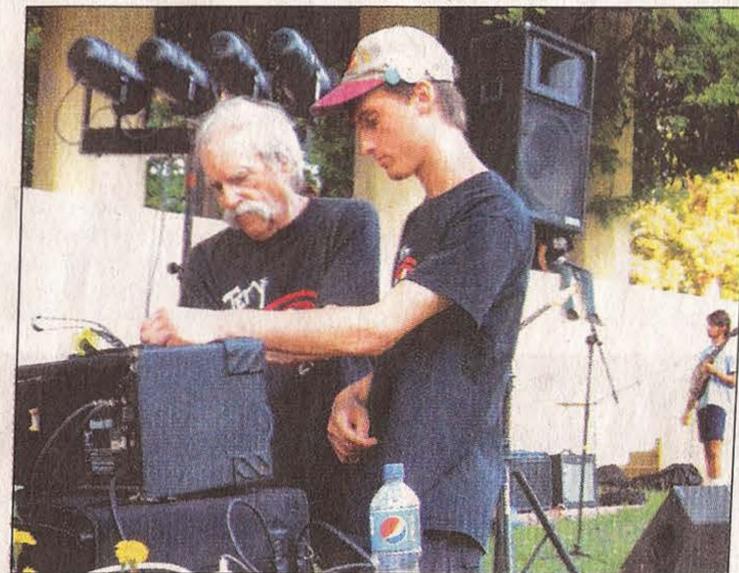
donation to Serendipity whenever he does it.

"Ed is old school in the best way possible," added Schneider. "If his students in Serendipity have nobody come to the shows, he sits back and says, 'Well, what

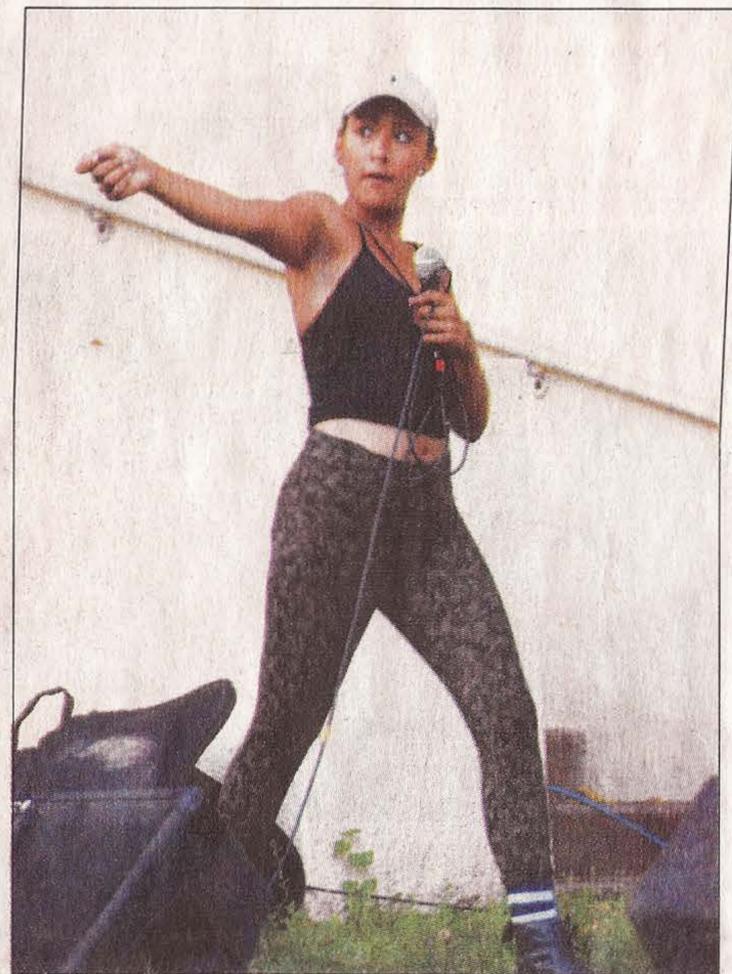
did you do to promote it to get people to come?' He teaches them that 'I'm not doing it for you. This is your gig. If you want people to come, you need to do the work to get it done.' He is like the ultimate role model, in my

opinion, for kids, and how to deal with them."

For Carine, Serendipity is a teaching opportunity. "It applies to a lot more than just rock and roll," he pointed out. I had a kid who was really doing well operat-



Ed Carine and Ben Wilson set the sound for the next band to take the stage. Carine runs this event and heads up the Serendipity initiative.



Olive of Your Mystery Guest delivers dramatic original rap with her partner, Bar.

ing the sound system, and I said, 'Next time, here's what I want you to do. Take one of the new kids and go through setting up the system, and just say out loud

Kids

FROM B1

what you're doing.' And he looked at me and said, 'Well, that's what you did for me six months ago.'

REACHING HIGHER

Carine, for his part, deflects much of the credit for Serendipity, pointing out instead how the young musicians' standards have risen over the years. "School of Rock has had an amazing influence on the kid musicians of this town," he said. "We used to get bands come to perform for the first time at Serendipity – the first time in their lives – and they would get so nervous that our main job on stage, the tech crew, would be to calm the performers down enough. It would usually take a tune or two before they got sufficiently relaxed to get into it and get going. But the School of Rock kids, they walk in and go, 'This is my stage here. Get off, we'll take care of this.' And they step up and they start right away. There isn't a trace of nervousness. They're pros already."

"So they make all the decisions. We meet for an hour a week talk about how Friday's event went, and what could be improved, what was good that we should keep, and what wasn't good that we should change around."

So now Carine, himself an accomplished bassist and guitarist, said he's looking forward to the

next concert at the amphitheater on Friday, August 21, from 7 till 10 p.m. "I get to jam with the School of Rock house band, and I get to hang with the kids.

"It's the best hobby you could have."

Contact Bob Cannon at cannon@northjersey.com

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