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Life With Patricia and Bruce Eskovitz
Creating Music, Sculpture and All That Jazz

By Tony Garofalo
Photography By Zsuzsi Steiner
"My daughter, Marci, brought him home and asked if we could keep him," Patricia Eskowitz says in her droll way. The 'him' wasn't a puppy or a stray cat, but the man she would end up marrying.

Bruce Eskowitz founded the Jazz Music Studies Program at Santa Monica's top-tier private school, Crossroads, where he taught saxophone to 16-year-old Marci. After a divorce, Bruce needed a place to live and Marci did indeed bring him home to check out a living space at her house near Wilshire Boulevard in Westwood. Eskowitz wound up renting a room over the garage.

"I was a single mom and Bruce and I became friends," Patricia Eskowitz explains. "We started taking walks into Westwood Village, sometimes going to a movie. Bruce picks up the story. "At some point, we were walking and began holding hands and...well...one thing led to another and here we are, thirty-three years later."

The son of an amateur musician, Eskowitz was eleven when he became infatuated with the sound of the tenor sax. While his peers were listening to Springsteen and the Rolling Stones, young Bruce was in the thrall of jazz legends Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane, and Stan Getz – immersing himself in their techniques until he could play their sound.

At 13, Eskowitz started playing professionally, joining the Jewish War Veterans Marching Band and gigging at private parties and events. The up-and-comer was 18 when he first recorded professionally. Still in his teens, Bruce found his way into the Merv Griffin Show’s Hollywood studio, getting his original tunes to the band’s legendary jazz musicians and having them played on air.

Eskowitz is often known as 'Dr. Bruce' or 'Dr. B' in jazz circles and at West LA’s Windward School, where he has directed the instrumental music program since 2005. The "Dr." doesn’t happen to be a moniker ala hip hop’s Dr. Dre, or basketball legend, Dr. J. Bruce holds a Masters Degree in Jazz Studies and a Doctor of Musical Arts degree - both from USC - where he directed the Jazz Ensembles and taught jazz theory, improvisation, and saxophone.

While at USC, Dr. Bruce also spearheaded the JazzReach program, providing concerts, lessons, and clinics to the LA area’s high schools. For his role in the program, the educator was presented with a Certificate of Appreciation by the Los Angeles City Council.

These days Dr. Eskowitz is a favorite among his students at the esteemed Windward School, offering them the benefit of several lifetimes in music: producing, arranging, performing, composing, and recording. "Success in music is not about talent, I tell them," shares Bruce. "It’s about hard work, discipline, and tenacity. Students need to be passionate and develop a work ethic that will push them to their fullest potential."

Eskowitz adds, "I let them know it’s okay to make a mistake, and then I’ll end with a quote by Beethoven: ‘but to play without passion is inexcusable.’ I tell them, ‘get up when you think you’ve failed. If you get up, you haven’t failed.’"

Bruce’s biggest fan just might be Patricia. After more than three decades of marriage, she is still front and center wherever Bruce performs. Before the pandemic, Patricia invited friends to join her at nightclubs and restaurants to hear his innovative jazz stylings.
"Being married to a musician has been fun. I've been given the opportunity to travel to wherever Bruce plays his horn, from San Antonio to Hong Kong," she says. "During the pandemic, I didn't need to go to a nightclub, I just sat cozily in my back yard, listening to good music coming from his practice studio."

Patricia's own artistic bent took her by surprise. "I was having knee surgery in the '70s, and this guy, an artist, would come into my hospital room to say 'hi' to Marci, who was three at the time. One day I wound up in his backyard with a hammer, a chisel, and a slab of marble, and...voila! A sculptor was born."

"I've kept at it ever since," she says. "All of my sculptures are in alabaster mounted on marble - I work in alabaster because it's softer than marble. Each piece takes me forever. They have to be filed, sanded, waxed, and polished. It's a big deal."

In addition to her sculpting heads of men and women, Patricia has created a seahorse, a bird, a dolphin, and other object d'art.

"What happens if you're chipping away on, say, a torso... and suddenly you make a mistake? Is that the end of an expensive piece of alabaster?" I ask Patricia.

"Not at all," she says. "I turn it into an abstract."

The artist's sculptures are not for sale, although she did sell one and barter another, to her regret. "My pieces were displayed in a Beverly Hills show and someone wanted to buy the seahorse. The man persisted until I just gave in. I didn't even know what to charge. I think I asked $200. I really loved that piece. I hated getting rid of it. To this day I'm sorry I let it go. The sculptures take so long to make - sometimes two or three years. I like having them around. They're like family."

As for the barter deal, Patricia traded one of her works to an acupuncturist in exchange for treatment. "The acupuncture wore off," she laments, "but the acupuncturist still has the sculpture!"

Halfway through grilling it, the propane tank ran out of fuel and needed replacing. There happened to be a leak in the new tank and when Bruce reignited the grill, it caused a massive fire that immediately set his fence ablaze. Fortunately, his neighbor called the fire department and the CCFD extinguished the inferno. BTW, he did eat the steak, he likes it well done!

I asked Pat about her reaction to the barbecue that backfired. She responded in her understated way, "I was pleased to not have been there."

While he cherishes his work as a teacher and mentor, Eskovitz is jazzed about a return to performing on the local club scene and recording solo or with a group.

The veteran sax player has recorded six albums leading the Bruce Eskovitz Jazz Orchestra, featuring some of the best jazz artists in LA. He is also in demand as a studio musician, having worked on sessions with musical greats Natalie Cole, Rosemary Clooney, Joe Cocker, Jimmy Webb, and Jack Jones.

After spending most of her work life as a legal secretary, Patricia's time is now given over to sculpting, traveling the world with Bruce, and continuing her work as a volunteer for such causes and organizations as P.A.T.H. (People Assisting the Homeless), the Culver City Women's Club, and the AIDS and ER units at Cedars-Sinai Hospital. When she's not in sculpting mode, Patricia's 'me time' is spent at the Culver/Palms YMCA in her water aerobics class, anxious to splash down once again, post-pandemic.

As for Marci, the teenage matchmaker who brought her mom and Bruce together, she now lives in San Francisco with two teens of her own, Aiden, 19, and Piper, 16. Bruce loves to toot his own horn about all five grandchildren: Aiden, Piper, his daughter Erin's son, seven-year-old Cooper, and daughter Leigh's two girls, Violet, six, and Lily, one.

Life is good for the Eskovitz's. "Patricia is one of the warmest, kindest, most empathetic people I've ever known," shares Bruce. "She was like that when we first met thirty years ago, and is still the same, more than 30 years later."

Patricia states what is surely music to Bruce's ears. "Being married to such a talented, versatile, amazing sax player has been quite joyful."

It's not surprising to learn that Bruce and Patricia's song is Rogers and Hart's "My Romance," especially as recorded by the Stan Getz Quartet. For the happy couple, it doesn't get much better than that.

Tony Garofalo is an Emmy Award-winner whose credits include The People's Court, NBC's telecast of The Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, and talk shows starring Merv Griffin, Regis Philbin and Cybill Shepherd.