

WOMEN IN SONG

The rise of a TRADITION



by Margaret Waage

For the past three years, the Southington Community Cultural Arts Center (SoCCA) hosted the Women In Song musical event and according to the organizer Becca Hasko, the annual October gathering has all the makings of a tradition.

The Women In Song event provides the opportunity for musicians to perform while raising money for the Prudence Crandall Center, the oldest domestic violence program in Connecticut. Hasko initially envisioned creating a space to honor women in music, "I wanted to listen to the voices of all my talented friends and all their talented friends."

In October 2017 the Women In Song event launched following the momentum of the first Women's March in Washington, D.C. While growing up in Southington Hasko said she'd observed more male bands forming than female bands. "I didn't (often) see girlfriends learning electric guitar. I would attend local music events and wonder "where are the women?"

Fueled by activism Hasko was driven to do something in her own community. "We need to continue creating spaces to highlight the diversity of music and how everyone has the right to perform and learn. There are so many voices not being heard, no matter how loudly they sing," said Hasko. "Women In Song is really about the lack of women's voices in all spaces. It's about advocacy and action and we all play a role in these issues. Even the smallest

things help to keep the flame of social change lit."

Raising money for the Prudence Crandall Center was important because domestic violence is an issue Hasko is passionate about. "Too frequently domestic violence is rooted in victim-blaming and it's not just physical, but also psychological," Hasko said.

According to the National Domestic Violence Hotline, on average, 24 people per minute are victims of rape, physical violence or stalking by an intimate partner in the United States, more than 12 million women and men over the course of a year. The Prudence Crandall Center mission, "To help individuals achieve lives free of domestic violence by providing care, advocacy, support, and education," Hasko supports as does SoCCA's Executive Director Mary DeCroce who agreed to host the charity event.

The Women in Song III event brought together fourteen artists that included Shannon Sullivan, Carmella Frosceno & Mika Derynioski, Beata Czop, Bri Gambacini & Malin Carta, Kate & Sarah Jackie, Becca Hasko, Whendi Cook, Tori Szulczewski, Lisa Cote, Susan Mazer & Celeste Cumming and raised approximately \$300 for the Prudence Crandall Center.

Guitarist Susan Mazer also a music educator and author, said playing at the Women in Song event was a unique experience, "It was the first time I've played in an all-women venue." Mazer said while researching early music education for a Women in Music curriculum she created for Fairfield CT's Sacred Heart University class she teaches, "Much of what I found



was primarily male-dominated and to play with all women performers was an interesting comparison."

Performer Dr. Whendi Cook Broderick, an Emancipatory Educator who teaches Social Justice and Psychology at Concordia College in Bronxville NY said she encourages her students to remain informed so they can think critically, consciously and creatively to become proactive agents of change in society through their work, civic engagement, and their vote." Broderick said it's important to be aware of the policies that impact us and those we care about, citing recent Justice Department changes to the definition of domestic violence (exclusion of psychological and emotional abuse, isolation, terrorizing, humiliating, manipulation, and coercive control).

Lastly, audience participant Edna Wells from Litchfield said, "As I am not from the area, I had heard about the Prudence Crandall Center, but was not aware of the work they do there. I am aware that October is breast cancer awareness month, but didn't know it was also domestic violence awareness month. By the way, I hate the term domestic

violence. Violence against another human being is violence. Because it happens in a domestic setting between partners or between parents and their children should not mean that we call it anything different from what it is or prosecute it in the courts any differently than any other crime of violence. I loved the event and would like to attend it again. The talent and music were wonderful and inspiring."

To learn about the work Prudence Crandall Center does visit <http://www.prudencecrandall.org> where you can schedule a Hope Tour at its Rose Hill facility which is held twice a month and/or by appointment.

Hasko said that with each year's planning of Women in Song she learns something new. Her takeaway this year is to make future events more collaborative. Hasko would like to create a committee to help host Women in Song next year. Visit the new Women In Song Facebook page at @womeninsongct (<https://www.facebook.com/womeninsongct/>) or email womeninsongdv@gmail.com for more information.