



bio

I was born into a family of 9 in a very small town in Virginia. Music played a pivotal role in my life from the very beginning. It was at home that I learned the value of telling the story behind the music and how powerfully that story can move the listener and impact one's life. I learned how vital it is to convey emotion in the music by watching my father's facial expressions and body language when he listened to music.

I had one year of formal piano lessons when I was nine years old and another year when I was 13. It was during those lessons that I learned to read music. The rest of my musical ability seemed to come to me naturally. For a brief time, as a teenager, I sang in a band at musical functions in my neighborhood. In this band was a pianist, a sixteen-year-old boy who would later become my husband. I composed and sang my first piece in the band when I was 15.

At the age of 18 my boyfriend and I joined a very strict religious group, got married and stopped performing in public - for good, it seemed. Four years later, I was a mother of two sons and found myself inculcating in them a love for music the same way my father had with me - by example. Many times we would sit together listening to music and I would ask them how did a certain song make them feel: Happy? Sad? Excited? Calm? Then I would ask them to stand up and show me what that would look like. Such were the 'games' we would play. Many mornings I awakened them with Aaron Copland's "Fanfare for the Common Man". Other times, we would 'dance' the story of Maurice Ravel's "Bolero". At night, I would compose lullabies for them, making up verses until they fell asleep.

I continued to play piano, compose, sing at home and eventually started giving piano lessons. Though my husband and I no longer performed in public, we were a very musical family, having friends over for food and conversation, but where music would be the centerpiece. My husband eventually learned to play five different instruments: trumpet, guitar, saxophone, flute, piano. Both sons sang and played several instruments between them. Occasionally, we would play together as a family.

In January 1996 I was 41 and working full-time at a bank when my oldest son convinced me to start singing again. After a big family discussion, it was decided that I should call a family friend and ask to sing with his quintet. He readily agreed and I started out singing one day a week in a smoky bar of a Ramada Inn for tips only. It would be several months before I actually earned any money. However, by January 1997, my husband was displeased with the amount of time I was spending with music and told me to stop singing. I had promised him when I first started that if he ever wanted me to stop, I would. So, I did. I stopped singing for 3 months and they were a miserable 3 months. After months without singing in public, I begged, wheedled and cajoled my husband into "allowing" me to sing again. I promised him I would do whatever it took to "please" him, as long as I could sing. He capitulated and I resumed singing with a ferocity I didn't know I had. So much so that, on the last day of 1997, when this time he issued the ultimatum that I either stop singing or he would force me to leave our home, rather than stop singing, I chose to leave after 23 years of marriage. 18 months later, I had divorced my husband, produced my first CD, quit my job at the bank and signed onto the MaxJazz label.

Between 2000 and 2004, I recorded four CDs on the MaxJazz label and have won several awards, both domestic and international, for those recordings. In 2005, I decided not to re-sign with MaxJazz, but to make my own way, call my own shots. In 2006, I decided not to re-sign with my booking agent, but to slow things down and work on a one-woman show.

In 2007, I released "Experiment In Truth". I have never forgotten the early lessons learned about the power of music. Today, I try to imbue that feeling of emotion into every song I write - every song I sing - every time. I am very happy to be singing today.

rene marie