

New Rochelle artist reflects on 50-year career after induction into Blues Hall of Fame

BY TIMOTHY O'CONNOR • TPOCONNOR@LOHUD.COM • JUNE 6, 2010

NEW ROCHELLE — Ten-year-old Roxy Perry heard the swing band playing at the Glen Island Casino in New Rochelle, saw the people dancing and knew what she wanted to do.

I want to sing with the band, she told her father.

Has someone been giving you alcohol, he asked.

No, she replied.

He gave the band a couple of bucks to humor the girl and let her sing a song.

So she got up on stage and belted one out. The crowd went crazy.

The song was "All of Me," she recalled.

"Yeah," she said, "at all of 10 years old."

Fifty years later, Roxy Perry has been inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame, recorded four albums and played at blues festivals all over the world, including the prestigious Montreux Jazz Festival in Switzerland.

"The odds are so slim on success," she said recently as she prepared to fly off to perform in the Bahamas. "Every time one of my songs is played on the radio or I get a great review, I'm still stunned.

"I'm just a girl from New Rochelle," she said.

Her induction into the Blues Hall of Fame last year as an ambassador to New York was a special honor, she said, because it comes from her peers.

"I would rather have the respect of being a musician than a star," she said. "The thing I feel is my biggest accomplishment is that I'm seen as an original and the real thing."

Perry grew up around music. Her parents were both swing kids — her dad was a dancer at the legendary Savoy nightclub in Harlem.

"When I was a kid, I never played dolls," she said. "I played records."

Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, Louis Prima — those were her music teachers. She was never classically trained as a musician or singer.

"There's a great deal of swing and jazz in the blues," said Perry, who sings and plays the harmonica.

As much as music has given her, Perry said she feels a duty to give back. She has hosted weekly jam sessions on the radio and at clubs for the past 30 years, with an eye toward giving local performers wider exposure.

She hosts weekly blues radio programs on the Internet at kconlineradio.com.

"I truly love my art and sharing it with all who love blues," she said when she accepted her induction into the Hall of Fame. "I love the community of blues artists and blues lovers. I can't imagine a life without the music and all those who are involved in it with me."

Along the way, Perry has received recognition for her efforts. In 2007, the Westchester Arts Council named her artist of the year. Her 2006 compact disc, "Back in Bluesville," was named best self-produced CD at the International Challenge in Memphis, Tenn.

"I'm not Bruce Springsteen level or Etta James," she said. "But I feel I've brought something to my community and have honored the talent that I was given."