

my other passion

Swinging Songstress

Patti Graham

Unit Manager, Lackmann Culinary Services
The Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi
New York

Hometown: Wantagh, N.Y.

Education: Graduated from SUNY Oswego with a B.A. in theater

Lives in: Bayonne, N.J.



A chance encounter at a park led Patti Graham to sing with the Wooster Street Trolley Jazz Band.

Since seeing “The Sound of Music” as a girl, **Patti Graham**, unit manager for **Lackmann Culinary Services at The Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi**, always wanted to sing. She spoke to FSD about her history with song and her experience singing with a seven-piece jazz band.

“I think it all started when I saw “The Sound of Music.” I was singing those songs the whole summer as a kid. Also I think I was influenced by Barbara Streisand in “Funny Girl.” I knew every word to those songs before I’d even seen the movie. I just knew as a kid that I loved music and I’ve wanted to sing as long as I can remember.

I started really singing in choir during grammar school. I was in the glee club and then in the high school chorus. In college, I performed with the choir chamber singers, which was considered the elite singing ensemble on campus. That was a wonderful experience. I started studying voice in college in a group setting and then with an individual instructor after I graduated. After college I went into summer stock theater, but what I really wanted to do was sing with a swing band.

Growing up I loved The Mills Brothers, The Andrews Sisters and all the swing big bands. I’ve also always loved Ella Fitzgerald, and to this day she is my favorite. I like the fact that she is really a musician. She stays true to the melody line. She’s so creative, but she’s always true to the song not like some other jazz vocalists like Sarah Vaughan and Billie Holiday—they go off the line and sometimes you don’t even know what they are singing anymore.

Judy Garland was another one of my favorites because of her emotion and passion. She always blew me away whenever I listened or watched her perform. She was the ultimate entertainer because she could act, dance and sing. Another fa-

vorite was Barbara Streisand. I loved her comedic sensibilities. I loved her acting. She had a lot of raw talent with her technique. Those three are probably the most influential to my singing.

With my voice teacher, we worked on music that I loved and technique because I wasn’t giving up my dreams of performing. As luck would have it, one day when I was living in Jersey City, N.J., I was walking home from work and I decided to take an alternate route home. As I walked I heard music that I could swear was being performed live. It was like the character in “Young Frankenstein” who heard the violin and just followed it—that was me. I followed the sound to a park where I found an outdoor concert in this little gazebo. During one of the band’s breaks, one of the guys in the band asked me how I was enjoying the music and I said I loved it. Then he asked if I was a performer? I asked why he asked that question, and he said it was because he had noticed I was very animated in the way I listened to the music. He invited me up to sing with them right then, and I’ve been singing with that jazz band for 12 years now.

We do a lot of outdoor concert series in parks in the summer. It’s a busy time for us. We play at clubs, weddings and for private parties. The band I’m performing with performs mostly New Orleans jazz. I sing standards so there’s a nice variety. The band is named after a street in Manhattan where there used to be a trolley depot. We’re called the Wooster Street Trolley Jazz Band.

We always have funny moments because my bandleader is crazy. He is a brilliant musician, but he’s kind of scattered so when I’m on stage sometimes I have to direct him. He is such a nut. He was the one that brought me up there that first day in the park. Just being with him is great because he is such a character. Every day with him is memorable.”