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# Frost: From Mt. Abe marching band to making movie music

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[1] VERMONT NATIVE JULIE Frost, who got her first guitar at age six and started her musical career in family sing-alongs around her family's New Haven home, recently won a prestigious Golden Globe Award for the song she co-wrote with Madonna.

NEW HAVEN — As a very young child in New Haven, Julie Frost showed she had a great sense of rhythm and was drawn to music, recalled her mother, Jean Stilley.

“She loved to be part of family sing-alongs,” Stilley said.

Stilley and Frost's father, Ted Wesley, gave Julie a guitar at age six, which she took to. She also learned a little piano and played the clarinet in the marching band at Mount Abraham Union High School.

Frost kept on playing and singing, creating a career in music for herself. That career hit a high note last week when Frost won the prestigious Golden Globe Award for Best Original Song for "Masterpiece," a song she co-wrote with Jimmy Harry and Madonna. The song is featured in the film "W.E.," which tells the story of King Edward VII and Wallace Simpson.

"We always thought Julie's music was going to take her to high places," Stilley said. "Julie has worked very hard on her music for a very long time, this is a great payoff.

"We are enormously proud."

Frost was "thrilled" at winning the award against competition including songs by Elton John and Mary J. Blige (two recording artists whom she calls her heroes). But she was no overnight success.

Frost attended Mount Abe through her sophomore year, then attended Philips Academy in Andover, Mass., where she graduated in 1988.

She briefly attended DePaul University in Chicago, studying "Entrepreneurship in the Arts," but decided to devote herself to her music. Frost held random jobs as a librarian, GED teacher, and, of course, waitress, to pay the bills, while developing her songwriting chops.

"I never had lessons, it's always been that I learn it as I go along," she said. "I'd look at the record and the chord chart and figure it out."

She wrote 400 to 500 songs, finding her voice and finding her niche.

She performed all over, including gigs at Nectar's in Burlington and even at the Rokeby Museum in Ferrisburgh.

As Frost's songwriting improved her niche as grown bigger and bigger. She's gone way beyond the stereotypical female singer-songwriter folkie. Her repertoire includes country music songs, "urban" hip hop songs.

"I won't pigeonhole myself," Frost said. "My catalog is pretty diverse on styles.

"I call myself a singer songwriter who writes pop songs."

As she has progressed in her career, Frost has moved into a sphere where writing, arranging, recording and marketing songs is a group effort.

"It's rare that you would hear a song on Top 40 radio that you'd hear a song written by a single artist," she said.

While making the art of creation a team effort is different than simply writing a song by herself with just her guitar, Frost is happy with the results.

“In a way I miss that single, solitary voice,” she said. “In a way it is good because you get the talents of a lot of people.”

Combining her talents has certainly paid off.

In 2010, Frost teamed up with Danish songwriter John Gordon to write “Satellite.” Sung by Lena Meyer-Landrut, the song hit number one on the charts in Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland, topping Billboard’s European Hot 100. It also won the prestigious Eurovision Song Contest, the finals of which were seen by millions of Europeans across the continent.

“Something like 150 million people watch Eurovision but you could walk down the street in the United States with the Eurovision trophy and no one would know,” Frost said.

But that opened more doors. Frost co-wrote “Just Can’t Get Enough” for Black Eyed Peas and the multi-platinum song hit No. 2 on the U.K. charts and No. 3 on the U.S. Billboard Hot 100. She also made the charts with “Countdown” for Beyonce, “Castles Made of Sand” for Pitbull and “Don’t Kick the Chair” for Dia Frampton

But through it all, Frost could not forget her roots in Vermont, where she still has a lot of family, including sister Mary Wesley, a Ferrisburgh resident. Her parents live in Lincoln, plus extended family reside in the Brattleboro and Burlington areas.

She reaches back to her childhood home where there were always guitars, fiddles and banjos around. Her father, a carpenter, is a member the Vermont musical duo “Beamish Boys,” and he still performs on weekends.

“There were always instrument cases around you could trip over, a piano in every house,” Frost recalls. “There was always a piano ... my dad always had a guitar in his hands.”

She recalls other early musical influences, such as “Mr. Bowers” — William T. Bowers, her marching band and chorus teacher at Mount Abe. Bowers retired from the school in 2000 after teaching Mount Abe students for 31 years.

“I think it takes something close to sainthood to teach a high school marching band,” she said. “He was such a kind, smiling person, I can still see his face, his hand waving his baton.”

With another top award under her belt, Frost said she will just keep doing what she is doing — writing songs.

She lives in the Los Angeles area, but gets back to Vermont at least a couple times a year.

“Whenever I need to go home it’s always 802,” she said.

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