



A TRIBUTE TO MIKE RENZI

Newport Life Magazine, his longtime friend and vocalist Annette Sanders is quoted as saying, "Renzi's genius is that he listens. He realizes he's not the front man. He's the anchor that makes the show pop." Mike Renzi's gift was for always seeming to make the right chord choice at the right moment for the song and the singer and making it sound like the only possible one.


Renzi grew up in the Federal Hill neighborhood of Providence, and although he relocated to New York in 1976, he remained a Rhode Islander in his heart and made his home in Middletown. He began studying piano at 8, received his bachelor's degree from Boston Conservatory and continued his studies at the Berklee College of Music. He formed his own group and, as they say in the music biz, found his chops playing

Michael Ernest Renzi passed away in Newport, Rhode Island on September 28, 2021 at the age of 80. Mike, as he was better known, was a legendary jazz pianist and arranger. He was music director of *Sesame Street* for twelve years, and was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2019 from the Society for the Preservation of the Great American Songbook. Above all, Mike was the accompanist of choice for many of the finest popular singers of the age: illustrious names like Peggy Lee, Mel Torme, Jack Jones, Liza Minelli, Maureen McGovern, and Carol Sloane. More recently, Renzi toured with Tony Bennett and Lady Gaga.




Mike Renzi with the cast of *Sesame Street*.




 Bill Curtis

Renzi possessed a phenomenal knowledge of the classic pop and jazz song repertory and could transpose the music to any key the singer needed. In a 2009 article about Mike in




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in local Rhode Island clubs like Kings and Queens in North Providence. He was encouraged to relocate to New York in 1976 where he began playing at premier establishments and where his gift for backing a singer was soon noted and in demand.

Renzi's list of accomplishments is staggering: five Daytime Emmy Awards for his work on Sesame Street; three more for the long-running soap opera, All My Children; pianist on the soundtrack of the Woody Allen film, Manhattan; accompanist for Lena Horne in her one-woman Broadway show, Lena Horne: The Lady and Her Music (1981-82) and a 1995 Grammy for the recording, An Evening With Lena Horne; and performances at the White House with Peggy Lee and actress and cabaret singer, Dixie Carter. His discography probably numbers close to 100 recordings with singers, his trio and other jazz greats.

I had the good fortune to meet and talk briefly with Mike Renzi after a performance with Annette Sanders at a Greenyard Vineyards summer concert in Portsmouth, Rhode Island. He was down to earth, gracious and generous with his time. During the past year, Renzi and vocalist Nicolas King performed virtually every Wednesday at Sardella's Italian Restaurant in Newport on Facebook, and on December 1st, they dedicated the Music Room to him. His talent and beautiful phrasing at the piano, whether as soloist, member of a jazz



Stephen Sorokoff

Mike Renzi accepting the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Society for the Preservation of the Great American Songbook.

combo, or supporting a singer, will be much missed. As Mel Torme would say in introducing Mike Renzi, there were "None Better."

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