

ISSA MENTORSHOP PROGRAM: My Vision and Why Mentorship Matters

By Linda Marks

I have been a professional musician for most of my adult life in two chapters, with a couple decades in between to raise my now young adult son as a single mom and care for my mom with Alzheimer's. I've released 16 studio albums with a 17th in the final stages of production for 2027 release. I've performed in hundreds of concerts in traditional and non-traditional venues, major venues and community settings, benefit concerts and ticketed events, solo, duo and with a band. I am proudly a Voting Member of the Recording Academy and curator of the ISSA Boston/Northeast Chapter.
Mentoring has been a central theme in my life: both mentoring and being mentored.

As an artist at all stages of my musical career, I have benefited from mentorship. At Yale, where I graduated with a degree in Music with Honors and Distinction as a self-taught, dyslexic, intuitive singer songwriter, Maury Yeston, the chair of the Music Department was a wonderful mentor, showing me what was possible as a songwriter (he was writing a musical while I was in school which went on to win a Tony Award). In my first chapter as a professional musician right after college, Ron Della Chiesa, a stellar DJ on the local NPR radio station invited me to share my music on his show and nurtured my vision of writing what inspired me without concern for genre. When I realized I needed to re-enter the singer songwriter world when my son was 12, Rebecca Parris, a phenomenal jazz singer and an even more phenomenal coach, held a space where I could cry my way through the songs I would later be able to sing from my heart. Doug Hammer, who has been my local sound engineer and collaborator for 15 years has helped me navigate all the technological changes in producing music, sat by my side as we edited recording projects note by note and line by line, and has been an instrumental partner in my countless dimensions of my creative process as both my music and I have continued to grow. A local journalist mentored me to improve my press release writing and article pitching skills, modeling her command of language and helping me hone my sense of pitch angles.

When I wanted insightful feedback about my songs in process, Susan Cattaneo has provided wisdom and coaching. In every facet of my work as a musician, mentorship has improved my skills, helped me realize my vision, and provided emotional anchoring in an often challenging business landscape.

I have also mentored artists most of my life, from a classmate in high school who was told she was tone deaf and not to sing (I helped her learn to match pitch and sing) to young artists I met as I helped run an adult-teen mentoring program for which I produced an annual benefit concert spotlighting young talent, a very talent daughter of a friend of mine who I invited to perform with me on some of Boston's biggest stages, to more formally through the mentorship program at the New England Regional Folk Alliance program and through my participation in GrammyU. It is a privilege to create a space to help other artists of all ages speak their dream, hone their skills, care for their hearts and work towards their vision.

All of this experience fuels my vision for the ISSA Summit Mentoring Program.

1. In our ISSA community, we have amazing people with all kinds of talents and experiences.
2. All of us have areas of expertise and areas where we can learn and grow and areas where our skills and experiences can help others learn and grow. This is true at all ages and stages of our personal and music lives.
3. When we offer skills and experiences through personal mentorship, we have the wonderful opportunity to help other artists grow and fly.
4. When we are mentored by other artists who have skills and experiences where we can learn and grow, we grow stronger.

At the **ISSA Summit,** the mentoring program will include both a **Mentoring Panel** on Thursday at 1 pm and an **on-site Summit Mentorship Program** where we will pair a mentor with a mentee to meet at a mutually convenient time during the days of the Summit.

The **Mentoring Panel** will explore what is mentoring and why will it matter. Joining me will be Dawn Rix, Charu Suri and Emily E Finke.

For the **On-Site Summit Mentoring Programs,** we have started to gather people who want to mentor and be mentored through the following google doc. Please sign up to mentor, be mentored or both here: https://forms.gle/kGX4NpqfVBGwdsLQ6

We hope this is just the beginning of building a Mentoring Program within the ISSA Community. We have so much to share with one another! **Help us lay that foundation at the ISSA Summit!**