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## OPINION

### Local music scene loses keyboard player, 'one of its bright lights'



*Lauren O'Malley Norris*  
**NOTL RANTS**

The Niagara music scene lost one of its bright lights three weeks ago, when monster keyboard-player Joe Ingrao passed away suddenly.

Despite his tough-guy act, Joe's commitment, kindness and humour deeply touched the lives of everyone he met, played with or played for,

including mine.

When you talk about Joe, you always wind up 'doing' him: Hunched over, voice all smokey and rich with a conspiratorial tone: "What's goin' on?" Joey knew what was going on.

A glimmer of a joke in his eye, he was always ready to laugh.

Why is it the best people leave the party first? Joe Ingrao, a great man and a musical epitome, died suddenly on March 19, exactly one week before his 50th birthday.

The gaping hole he left behind will never be filled, no matter how many impersonations we do, no matter how many stories we tell.

But we try to keep him around us by recounting his tales and hearing his music.

Those narratives. Never a quiet man (not even while playing the keyboard: like Glenn Gould or Oscar Peterson, Joey's droning moans are familiar to anyone who played with him), once he started telling his stories you might as well sit down, have a drink, and give up on wanting to do anything other than listen for the next few hours.

The stories could be about his kids, his wife, his folks, his years on the road with so many bands, or his colleagues at the

Casino, where he'd had a regular piano-bar gig.

They were invariably funny, absurd, observant and kind.

Joe's film noir exterior hid a big sweetie; his every subject was treated with humour and without judgement.

We laughed, we laughed. Okay, we did cry too, but only because we were laughing so hard.

Joe's keenly observant eye always amazed me. He would remember every item of clothing, hairstyles, accessories.

For such an undeniably masculine person, he'd come at you all girly-girl and say, "Lauren, I like you in the black, but the red shirt you had on last week, that was really you. A little blonder now, eh? Nice. Dory, that jacket is beautiful. And you trimmed your bangs? Your eyes look beautiful."

He was smooth, sure, but he meant it, and we all felt special around him.

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