

Mentoring Bond Between Blind Musicians Runs Deep

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LITTLE HAVANA (CBSMiami) — It's not unusual for soulful jazz tunes to waft from an upstairs room at Miami Lighthouse for the Blind. For Danays Bautista and Jeff Zvac, it's a harmony that goes deeper than the tunes they [play](#) .

“Playing together, enjoying [music](#) together, is the greatest learning any musician can have, I think,” said Bautista.

Bautista lost her vision when she was five years old, caught in the crossfire of a police shooting in her native Cuba. But that has not slowed down the prolific [musician](#) .



She has found a friend and mentor in Jeff Zvac, a fellow musician who is also blind. Zvac teaches a jazz history course at Miami Dade College, and music lessons at Lighthouse.

“Everyone has a problem, and they can work at it and turn it into a blessing for themselves,” said Zvac. “And the reverse of that is that every person is also given a blessing. The thing I advise my students to do– and the thing I try to do myself– is to tell them that these [jazz](#) musicians that we’re learning about did this thing, which was to get together, learn, hone their craft, struggle with it, work with it, get to another level and struggle with that, so that they can have a good time with it, and they can give other people a good time because of what they have done.”

Zvac has been blind since he was a baby, born premature and given too much oxygen. As a child, his classmates teased him until he started playing the saxophone in fourth grade. He went on to learn clarinet, piano, and flute; studied jazz and classical music and earned a Master’s degree in jazz [performance](#) from the University of Miami.

Now, he says his greatest gift is bringing others the joy of music.

“A good day for me occurs when I can reach one person with my music,” said Zvac.

Since meeting Bautista a year ago, Zvac has had many good days.

An accomplished musician in his own right, Bautista was born with music in her blood.

“Since I was a very little girl, maybe two years old, or three, I remember myself picking up branches from the ground, and saying, ‘This is my guitar,’” said Bautista. “I always loved music. Always.”

Bautista also has a formal education in music. She studied the prestigious Havana Conservatory of Music and moved on to perform professionally, eventually moving to Spain, where she performed for almost a decade.



It was there that she experienced what she calls her “second accident.”



“I was trying to enter the subway, and I was confused,” said Bautista. “I thought it was the door to enter the subway, but it was not the door.”



Instead, she walked into the space between two train cars and fell onto the tracks just as the train started moving, crushing her.

“I lost my left arm,” said Bautista. “Guitar has always been my passion. I knew I couldn’t play anymore at some point when I woke up, and it was really hard. Still, guitar is something I dream of doing, playing guitar. But at the same time, music is like medicine. It’s something that I love, and it’s something that helped me go on again.”

After 50 days in [bed](#) , Bautista started singing again; giving a concert the week she left the hospital.

Then, she moved with her husband to Miami, where she met Zvac. They clicked right away.

“That’s something that happens immediately between [musicians](#) ,” said Bautista. “It’s a kind of extra communication. It’s straight forward.”

“The whole idea was to make Danays feel comfortable so that she would want to sing her best, and give her best music to the Lighthouse and our group,” said Zvac. “I had heard some stuff that she’d done on the Internet and in Spain, and I thought, oh my gosh, this lady really has a great way with the song.”

Zvac worked hard to make Bautista feel at home. He incorporated her into his band, showed her around and taught her the meaning of patriotic American songs. Now, they practice, collaborate and perform together regularly.

Zvac Bautista inspires him.

“With all the changes Danays has come through, she has a wonderful spirit,” he said. “That spirit comes out when she sings a song.”



“I think life is always a matter of learning if you are open to it,” said Bautista. “So listening to other musicians, or people, or whatever, you can always learn. Jeff, I like him, because he has a professional attitude, and I love it. He is always willing to help.”

Bautista even calls Zvac her hero.

“It’s one of the best compliments I’ve ever gotten from anyone,” said Zvac. “It keeps me very humble to hear that, and I’m glad to hear that, but I hope that she has many more wonderful heroes as life goes on.”

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Rudabeh Shahbazi