

NEWS

At Concord's Multicultural Festival, Troy Cromwell's lasting sound remains



by Catherine McLaughlin
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Troy Cromwell had a sharp ear.

Raised on the layered tones of his father's jazz performances, he could tell when a singer was slightly flat or the speaker at a political rally was a little too quiet.

When he went to the Multicultural Festival in 2021, the first year it moved from Main Street to Keach Park, he could tell something was off with the sound.

The keystone of the festival is a packed schedule of performances including dancing, singing and instrumental music. The acoustics at the wide-open park were harder to nail than the echoing, stone cocoon of the statehouse plaza.



Troy Cromwell at the Concord Multicultural Festival in Keach Park. Credit: Courtesy

Cromwell, who'd been a fan of the festival for years, reached out to organizers to offer his help. It worked wonders.

"I know for some people it probably doesn't make a difference, but Troy could hear that stuff," his wife, Penny Cromwell, said. "It's for everybody, but he saw it as a festival for people of color. Whatever they were presenting... he wanted the sound to be perfect."

Subtly putting the festival's voice back in tune was a prime example of the community organizing spirit that has supported the event over its nearly 20 years. It was also quintessential Troy Cromwell. While he transitioned away from his budding career as a musician, he often donated sound services to various gatherings and events in Concord. He died suddenly last year at the age of 50 from a brain bleed.

Cromwell's medical condition started innocuously, with a few sleepless nights and a racing heartbeat. His passing was devastatingly fast. He was fit, he was enveloped in a community that he loved, and he was as happy as he'd ever been.

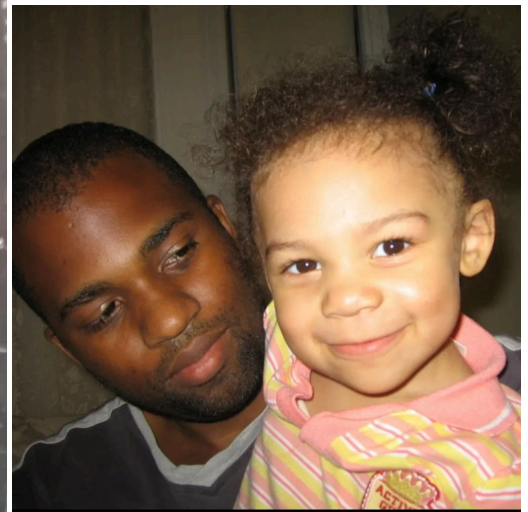
"He was the kindest person I knew," Penny said. "He was talented, he was smart, he loved people – he was everything."

The loss was brutal for his family.

Cromwell was in his twenties and playing full-time in a band when he met his future wife through an online message board. They were debating, of all things, the merits of the band Metallica's lawsuit against the mp3 sharing platform Napster. The year was 2000.

Within a year, he moved to New Hampshire for love, leaving New Jersey to join Penny in Manchester in 2001. They got married, had a daughter together, and their family came up to Concord in 2008.

Cromwell had been in a Moving to New Hampshire meant that Cromwell could no longer pursue music as he had – as the keyboard player in a metal band – but he still touched an instrument daily. After years of bouncing around different jobs, the one he landed at the Capitol Center for the Arts in 2021 was a dream.



"Troy did not say 'no' to anything," said Sal Prizio, the Capitol Center's executive director. "He was one of those amazing humans being who, no matter how stressful the day, he never let it get to him."

Prizio didn't realize just how far Cromwell's community involvement went outside work – he didn't boast about it.

“He firmly believed in investing in causes he believed in,” Prizio said.

His passions went far beyond music, though. When something caught Cromwell’s interest – from coaching his daughters’ softball team to BMX biking – he quietly but relentlessly followed it.

Cromwell was a self-taught pole vaulting star in high school, and kept up his love of running and competing in track and field events throughout his life.

He’d gone to school to become an engineer, but couldn’t resist his dream to make it big in a band.

He was a doting parent, as attentive to his daughter Jordan as he was to Penny’s two children from a previous marriage.

He supported local reproductive rights efforts, youth groups and feminist organizations, including engineering the sound at rallies.

“Everything Troy did was with purpose,” Penny said. “He was a unicorn...if he wanted to do something, he was going to do it. He just excelled at stuff.”

Becoming involved with the multicultural festival was no different.

The festival honored Troy with lawn signs last summer, and students from Concord High School stepped forward to handily take on the sound system. Still, his quiet warmth is missed.

Cromwell, loved the festival because “it exposed people to people. He felt like it’s easy to hate someone you don’t know or understand,” Penny wrote. Food and music, to him, were everyone’s shared loves – and a path towards mutual understanding.

Cromwell didn’t just manage the music; he watched and enjoyed every performance, dancing or nodding from his soundboard.

“It helped us to add another level of professionalism,” said organizer Jessica Livingston. “We clearly are growing, and we needed that type of support to grow.”

Moving the festival to Keach Park meant much higher attendance and participation by local kids, Livingston noted.

“Here they can watch people who look like them up on stage being celebrated,” she said. “That’s the same mindset of what Troy had. That they deserved to have the best, to be taken seriously.”