

## FRIENDS OF DELMARK

# Donna Herula

## Love Counselor with a Steel Guitar

BY JULIA MAGNESS

**D**onna Herula is an amazing woman.

She not only plays the blues, she also uses it to help heal people. She is a teacher at the Old Town School of Folk Music and a Mental Health Counselor, specifically a marriage counselor. She has helped people, especially through the pandemic, who are feeling down and stressed out.

“A reason a lot of us got into the Blues is because of traumatic experiences. I use my experiences and integrate that into my lyrics. Connecting and gaining strength and having empathy for other people is instrumental. I like to connect with my students, clients, and my audience,” says Donna.

I had a chance to speak with her about her very interesting life and career.

**Did you know Bob Koester? Any memories of Jazz Record Mart?**

I did meet Bob Koester and went to the Jazz Record Mart a number of times, but I know Julia Miller much better than I knew Bob. I was part of the Women in the Blues photography display. I got to meet Julia and a lot of the Delmark record people. Julia and Michael Frank put on a street festival this summer and I was invited. The name of the September 4th event was the Rockwell Blues & Jazz Street Stroll. It was sponsored by Delmark Records, Earwig Records and the Rockwell Business & Residents Association. Harlan Terson and I were the first performers for this first annual event!

Julia has been extremely supportive of my music and I felt so great being a part of this festival.



Real comfortable with her hands on her steel guitar.

Photo/Roman Sobus

<https://delmark.com/2021/09/1st-annual-rockwell-blues-jazz-street-stroll-photos-videos/>

**Favorite Chicago artist? Why?**

I have so many it is hard to pick just one. I am really big on tradition. I would say Big Bill Broonzy, who was instrumental in the opening of the Old Town School of Folk Music, Muddy Waters, Tampa Red, Elmore James, and Hound Dog Taylor have all influenced my playing.

I think the world of both of Buddy Guy. I really love his dynamics, the ability to go from an acoustic song all the way into a full band.

**What about some younger Chicago musicians?**

I love Jamiah Rogers, he has a lot of promise. Two other rising stars in the Chicago Blues scene are Ivy Ford and Melody Angel. All three are excellent singers and blues guitarists.

**Favorite Chicago night club? Why?**

Buddy Guy's Legends. It is like a family there. I have been playing there since 2012. Everyone is so kind. The food is great. They have early, free acoustic sets every Friday and Saturday. It is really a validation for someone who enjoys acoustic blues.

**Favorite Chicago food?**

Oh my gosh! The hot dogs are great but I became a vegetarian so I haven't been eating any of it. You

have to try it all, hot dogs, Italian beef and sausage, deep pan pizza.

**Is Grant Park or Millennium Park your favorite for the Chicago Blues Festival?**

I think there are advantages to having it in Millennium Park. In Grant park the grounds were affected by rain and flooding. I like the more homey atmosphere in Grant Park but in Millennium Park they have more tents and chairs. Now you don't have to cart all this stuff with you and if it rains it is not going to destroy the festival. I hope it continues.

**What other record labels do you like?**

Michael Frank at Earwig

Records is very supportive of me and other artists. He is a very helpful person. Even though I am not on his label he offers a lot of great advice.

**Favorite artist on Delmark? Present or past?**

There are so many. Dave Spector, Rockin' Johnny Burgin, Lurrie Bell has been so cool. He sat in with me a few times at Legends.

**Did you study music in school or are you self-taught?**

In High School I took music theory and was in the Jazz Band. I learned from my brother's friend at 10 years old. I took some lessons and started a band when I was 14. I listened to a lot of records and tried to hear what other people were doing.

**Who are your mentors and heroes in your musical journey?**

Chris Walz was a teacher at the Old Town School of Folk Music. I took some of his classes and when he went on sabbatical, I covered a class for him. He recommended that they hire me. Andy Cohen showed me around acoustic blues venues. Liz Mandeville was like a big sister. She was someone I looked up to as a woman blues artist. She is a good songwriter and it was great playing with Liz.

**When, many years from now, you are approaching the pearly gates, what would you say, play or sing to get St. Peter to let you in?**

I would play the title track of my new album 'Bang at the Door!' <https://donnaherula.com>  
<https://www.oldtownschool.org/teachers/Donna-Herula/>—

Photo/Roman Sobus



Blues music is Folk music!