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PROGRAM NOTES: "A Tribute to Stephane Grappelli" featuring Randy Sabien & Brian Torff

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Randy Sabien met Brian Torff just after he heard his first recording of Stephane Grappelli, the legendary, French Jazz Violinist from the swing era. This record instantly changed Randy's musical direction on the violin and led him to a Chicago night club where he could see Grappelli in person. Brian was also in attendance at this concert. He was the bassist in Grappelli's unique rhythm section. At the young age of 22, it was a thrill and a privilege to be playing with someone he considered to be a true master.

With encouragement from Grappelli, Randy focused intently on learning to play jazz. Amazingly, by age 21 he founded and chaired the string department at the Berklee College of Music. He also formed his own bands, recorded several albums and published a method for teaching jazz strings.

Brian continued to excel, performing around the world and recording with Grappelli and other jazz greats including George Shearing, Cleo Laine, Marian McPartland, Errol Garner, Mel Torme, Tony Bennett, Mary Lou Williams and others. He soon became known as a top jazz bassist and music educator, directing the music department at Fairfield University.

Three years after Grappelli's passing, Randy and Brian bumped into each other at a jazz education convention. Naturally, the conversation turned to their old friend. They marveled at Grappelli's legacy—the creation of one of the hottest sounds in the history of jazz using only a violin, 2 or 3 guitars and a bass. Brian, who "...missed the woody connection between bass and violin", invited Randy to join him in putting together a band that would honor Stephane.

True to Grappelli's form, on the first set they would play his standards. The second half of the show would illustrate how Brian and Randy have gone on to find their own musical voices. It would be an evening of hot music and interesting first hand commentary about Grappelli from two reverent players who knew him.

To road test the idea they booked five midwest concerts employing the renown talents of Mike Dowling and Cliff Frederiksen on guitars. The response was phenomenal with three sell-outs including The Madison Civic Center. Audiences were jubilant about the music and loved hearing memories about Grappelli.

RANDY SABIEN

In the fourth grade, Randy Sabien signed on to play drums for the youth orchestra in Rockford, Illinois. Someday he would be a great rock and roll drummer. However, his plans changed when the orchestra director found himself short on string players. Randy wound up with a bow in his hand instead of drumsticks.

NPR's Jazz Profiles dubbed Randy as "The past, present and future of jazz violin." His eclectic style started with classical violin lessons. From there he learned how to play along with records by the Grateful Dead, Papa John Creach, James Taylor and others. He continued his study of classical music at the University of Illinois, augmenting his formal education with as a country/rock fiddler. But his most pivotal musical influence came when he first heard the music of the great jazz violinist, Stephane Grappelli. With a new musical focus, he began learning and playing the jazz of the 30s, 40s and 50s on his violin.

In 1977, Randy enrolled at The Berklee College of Music in Boston. One year later, at the age of 21, he returned to found and chair their new string department. He stayed there for another three years.

After Berklee, Randy performed with and produced three albums for Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee, Jim Post. This led to violin, mandolin, guitar and piano accompaniment for a host of singer/songwriters. In between folk gigs, He worked on material for an album with his newly formed jazz quintet.

The album that emerged from all of these influences was a colorful, melodic, energetic album of blues based jazz. **In a Fog** was released and sent out for review by Flying Fish Records. *Billboard*, *Jazz Times*, *The Christian Science Monitor* and *USA Today* gave it glowing reviews. He was also voted Artist Deserving Wider Recognition in *downbeat* magazine's annual critic's poll.

In 1989, Randy followed his heart to northern Wisconsin where he started his own record label, Fiddlehead Music. Since then, he has released another five titles, with two more in the works. His discography is predominantly jazz with a couple of albums that cover swing, roots blues and rock and roll from the sixties. He also plays regularly a jazz violin, guest soloist with symphonies across the country.

Hayward, Wisconsin is home to Randy and his family. If you can't get him on the phone, he's probably out back trying to catch a big fish or start the Gravelly. He'll get right back to you.

APPEARANCES

NPR'S Jazz Profiles
A Prairie Home Companion
Juneau Jazz Festival
Lake Superior Big Top Chautauqua
WI Public Television Special
Madison Civic Center
Austin City Limits

MUSICAL LIAISONS

Clyde Stubblefield
Vassar Clements
John Harmon
Jeff Eckels
Greg Brown
Prudence Johnson
Jim Post
Kate Wolf

SYMPHONY ORCHESTRAS

Anchorage
Fairbanks
Grant Park

PRINT/REVIEWS

Chicago Tribune
USA Today
Jazztimes
downbeat
Billboard
Christian Science Monitor
Jazz Philharmonic String Method+CD, author

CURRENT BANDS

The Fiddlehead Band
Randy Sabien & Mike Dowling

TEACHING HIGHLIGHTS

Berklee College of Music, faculty
Eastman School of Music, workshop
American String Workshop, faculty
International Assn. Jazz Educators, presenter
International String Workshops, faculty

www.randysabien.com

BRAIN TORFF

BRIAN TORFF is a renowned bassist and composer, and is currently Music Program Director at Fairfield University. He is a featured bass soloist, working with the Hobgood, Torff and Wertico trio, the fusion band, Thunderstick, he performs in jazz festivals around the U.S., and has founded the Fairfield University Summer Jazz Camp. He has served as co-chair person for the music advisory board for the National Endowment for the Arts.

Brian Torff's professional career began in 1974 when bassist Milt Hinton offered him the opportunity of touring with Cleo Laine. During the late 70's, Torff recorded and performed with pianists Mary Lou Williams and Marian McPartland, and toured Australia, New Zealand, and Hong Kong with violin virtuoso, Stephane Grappelli.

He played in Erroll Garner's last group and worked in the big bands of Oliver Nelson, and the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Orchestra.

In 1979, Brian Torff joined in a duo with pianist George Shearing. In the course of their 3 1/2 year collaboration they toured throughout the U.S., Europe, Brazil, and South Africa. Torff and Shearing were featured on the NBC Tonight Show, Merv Griffin, and their own PBS special from New York's Cafe Carlyle. They received worldwide acclaim, and were invited to perform at the White House in 1982 for President Reagan.

Brian Torff is a noted composer who has contributed works for three George Shearing albums, as well as his own recordings - Hitchhiker Of Karoo, and Manhattan Hoe-Down. He has written scores for the Boston Pops, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the Pittsburgh Symphony, as well as for big band festivals throughout the U.S.

Brian Torff was recently named faculty member of the year by the AHANA students and the office of Multicultural Relations at Fairfield University. He has recorded recently with Stephane Grappelli, Toots Thielemans, Hobgood, Torff and Wertico, Milt Hinton, Carrie Smith, made a video with Larry Coryell, and performs in the group Samuels, Beck, and Torff, which features vibist Dave Samuels, and guitarist Joe Beck, in addition to appearances as a solo artist and clinician. He is currently composing and publishing big band charts for college and high school bands in a world beat style and was recently featured at the University of Wisconsin- La Crosse Winterfest.

He has recently published articles on Mary Lou Williams, Stephane Grappelli, and is currently working on an interview/essay on his mentor, the bassist Milt Hinton. A new CD, Union featuring pianist Laurence Hobgood, drummer Paul Wertico and bassist Brian Torff will be released on Naim Records in the Spring of 1997.

"A virtuoso bassist, imaginative and distinctive in his solos, but more than that, a solid composer and arranger." ~John S. Wilson, New York Times

APPEARANCES

Royal Albert Hall
Carnegie Hall
NBC Tonight Show
Hollywood Bowl
PBS Special, Live at The Cafe Carlyle
The White House

MUSICAL LIAISONS

Stephane Grappelli
George Shearing
Tony Bennett
Marian McPartland
Erroll Garner
Larry Coryell
Mel Torme
Mary Lou Williams
Frank Sinatra

COMPOSITIONS PERFORMED BY

Boston Pops
Los Angeles Philharmonic
Pittsburgh Symphony

PRINT/REVIEWS

New York Times
Chicago Tribune
Jazztimes
downbeat
Jazz Improv Magazine, columnist
Mary Lou Williams Book, author
International Assn. of Jazz Educators, contributor
Groves Dictionary of Jazz

CURRENT BANDS

Thunderstick
Union Trio
The Coryells
Helen Merrill

TEACHING HIGHLIGHTS

Fairfield University Music Director & Summer Jazz Workshop Director - at present
International Assn. Jazz Educators, presenter
National Endowment for the Arts, Music Advisory Board, Co-Chairman

www.briantorff.com