

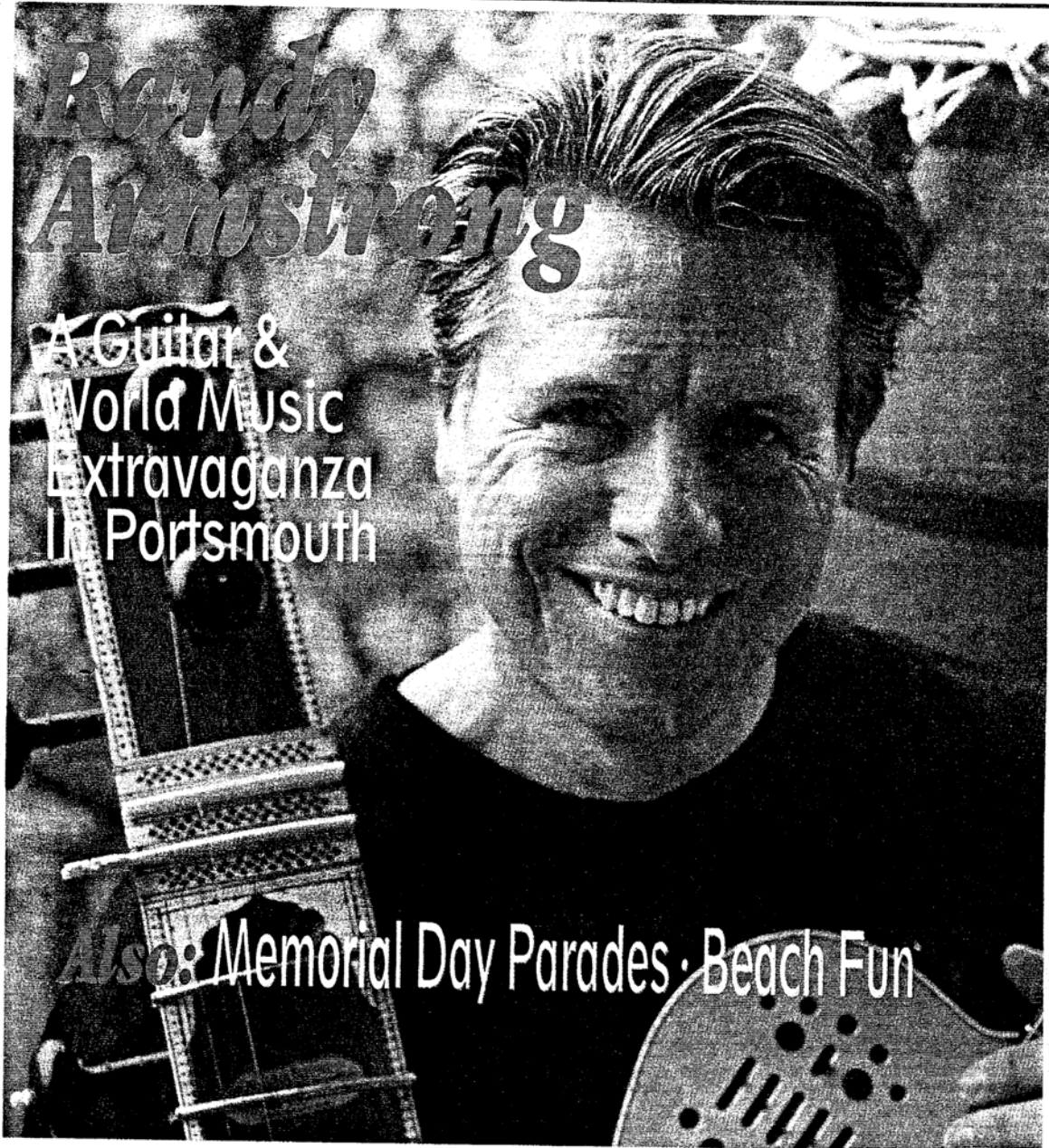
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Thursday, May 22, 1997

NEW HAMPSHIRE WEEKEND

The Union Leader
Manchester,
New Hampshire

The best guide to what's happening in and around New Hampshire this weekend.



**Randy
Armstrong**

A Guitar &
World Music
Extravaganza
In Portsmouth

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Randy Armstrong Soloing His World Music

By LAURA POPE
NH Weekend Arts Correspondent

PORTSMOUTH — Whether he's performing in his Doah World Music Ensemble or Unu Mondo, Randy Armstrong provides the musical virtuosity and breadth of an entire orchestra. So Armstrong's decision to pursue a solo career as a world music composer and instrumentalist is not a far-fetched concept at all.

Anyone who's witnessed Armstrong on stage will not soon forget the ease in which he plays an assorted array of stringed and exotic instruments or the layers of rhythms he coaxes out of them. Armstrong takes the stage Friday and Saturday evening, May 23 and 24, at the McDonough Street Studio Theater in Portsmouth to perform a full solo program of original music, presented by the New Hampshire Theatre Project, NHTP, as well as samples of music from the repertoire of Miles Davis and Joe Zawinul of Weather Report. The concert begins at 8 p.m.

both nights at the theater that serves as home to Pontine Movement Theatre and is located on the street that runs parallel to Portsmouth's busy Islington Street.

"I'll have at least six guitars on stage including an acoustic synthguitar and a 1953 classic jazz guitar, plus sitar and many African percussion instruments," says the performer who co-founded and recorded six releases with the now dormant Doah World Music Ensemble and the still active Unu Mondo.

Highlights of his work in Doah include performances at the Carnegie Recital Hall in 1979 playing on a double bill with the Mahavishnu Orchestra and three separate performances at Lincoln Center. Armstrong and Doah co-founder, Ken LaRoche, played at these prestigious venues in a formation Armstrong dubs, the "Doah Duo."

Like Doah, Unu Mondo strengthened the reach of original world music in the region,

throughout the U.S., Canada and in India. Both groups have shared the stage with other high caliber artists such as Dizzy Gillespie, the Paul Winter Consort, Michael Hedges and Richie Havens. Of all the recordings, "World Dance" generated the most ripples in mainstream music, charting at number seven in Billboard's adult contemporary charts.

Recently, Armstrong has favored solo and duo work over ensemble shows. "In the last five years, I've done quite a few solo shows as an artist-in-residence and have also been collaborating with Genevieve Aichele, a movement artist and actress who serves as the artistic director of the New Hampshire Theatre Project based in Portsmouth."

Since 1992, the two have performed a series of stories from around the globe sustained with world music in schools throughout New England. The pair's work has fueled Armstrong's fifth album, "World Tales," a CD collection of stories and original world music.

"World Tales" actually reflects a performance called Beyond Myth Unu Mondo performed with the New Hampshire Theatre Project in 1992. I wrote the music while NHTP put together a number of creation myths." Having performed "World Tales" on stage with his remarkable Unu Mondo group, Armstrong synthesized segments of the Beyond Myth show with Aichele specifically for school audiences.

"We reduced Beyond Myth down to tell different kinds of stories through narration and music. Genevieve sings a bit, co-narrates, adapted the stories for schools and created an original story." Five stories unwind during the course of an hour on "World Tales," on sale as a limited release at select stores in the Seacoast this year. Armstrong says he's in the midst of negotiations with recording and publishing companies to re-release the world storybook and world music as a combined book and CD package.

Although Armstrong still works with Unu Mondo (they will perform July 17 at the Cochecho Arts Festival in Dover and open the League of NH Craftsmen Fair Aug. 2), he performs 70 times a year in con-



RANDY ARMSTRONG

cert and artist-in-residence settings with Aichele throughout New England. "Doah had collaborated on projects with dance companies and other related performance groups so I have an understanding of combining forces with others," explains the gifted performer who teaches students West African drumming and North Indian sitar at Phillips Exeter Academy in Exeter.

The unequivocal success of pairing world stories with world music in a duo has greatly influenced Armstrong to embark on a solo career. In his upcoming Portsmouth shows he will present an all-instrumental extravaganza that showcases his abilities on acoustic and synthesizer guitars and a plethora of music-making apparatus.

"I haven't been performing on the sitar in concert as much as I have teaching the instrument, but I will perform on sitar at the Portsmouth shows as well as the African djembe, a popular goblet-shaped drum topped with goat skin; the balofon, or xylophone from Burkina

Faso (formerly Upper Volta, north of Ghana); the Brazilian berimbau, a bowed instrument with a single metal string strung across a calabash gourd; the African thumb piano, the Lakota courting flute, a traditional Native American instrument; and the mbira, a musical instrument played by the Shona people in Zimbabwe."

For tickets, reservations and directions to the McDonough Street Studio Theater, call the New Hampshire Theatre Project at 431-6644.



"WORLD TALES", a new CD, combines the talents of musicians Randy Armstrong and Genevieve Aichele.

If You Go... 

What: Randy Armstrong

Where: McDonough Street Studio, McDonough Street, Portsmouth

When: Friday and Saturday, May 23 and 24, 8 p.m.

Tickets: \$12 general; \$10 seniors, students. Reservations: 431-6644.