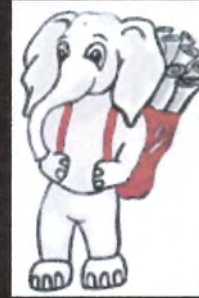


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Randy Armstrong brings world music to Franklin



Musician Randy Armstrong, who brought his trio to the Franklin Opera House on Friday night, conducts a workshop earlier in the day for music students from Franklin High School. Above, he teaches rhythms on African drums. Below, he demonstrates some of the techniques he brought to the guitar from other instruments from around the world.



By **THOMAS P. CALDWELL**

FRANKLIN — Music students at Franklin High School had a real treat on Oct. 3 when Randy Armstrong, a musician formerly associated with the group Do'ah, presented a free workshop on African drumming at the Franklin Opera House. He would be appearing there later that night with his world fusion music trio for the Common Folk Music Series' season opener.

A musician who got his start after hearing a music program at his school in Columbus OH, Armstrong is a strong believer in having artists in the schools; and, when he heard that Franklin had had to cut an elementary art position in order to present a balanced budget, he decided to offer his services to the school district at no charge.

"I'm on the board of the NH Alliance for Arts Education," said Armstrong after the workshop, "and I know the importance of the arts as an educational tool for human development. Music improves cognitive skills, teaches working in groups, and promotes community service."

Noting that he has traveled around the world, performing and picking up the 200 instruments in his collection, Armstrong said, "This is the richest country on the planet, and there's no excuse not to come up with the money for the arts. Even in India, with all its poverty, people are on pins and needles to learn music.

"If we truly don't want any child left behind," he continued, "we need a fully integrated curriculum."

School board chair Katharine Fuller, who attended the workshop (and joined in the drumming), noted that her employer, Franklin Regional Hospital, stresses teaching as a team for medical safety, and, "Where do we learn to cooperate? In the band, in athletics ... The co-curricular activities are critical."

"I'm a player and that's what I do," said Armstrong, "but I'm also a father, and I know the importance of music in the schools. My youngest son is a freshman in college with a scholarship in acoustic jazz bass."

The Randy Armstrong Trio made its debut at the Franklin Opera House last year and Armstrong is thrilled with the acoustics of the old building. He spoke of his support of the

restoration project, noting that part of the mission of the opera house is to “bring things to the children and the community”.

Armstrong has played guitar and trumpet since he was in seventh grade, but his interest in musical instruments from around the world did not really take off until he moved to New Hampshire in 1973.

The seeds, however, were planted when he watched another Armstrong — Neil — step onto the moon in 1969. “The sight of the earth rising over the horizon got my attention,” he said, and he realized how small the planet really is.

After moving to New Hampshire, he took up studies of the sitar in Boston MA with a master at the New England Conservatory of Music and then picked up more knowledge from various private performers who were anxious to share their expertise.

Armstrong now has 10 albums out, with his most recent, No Regrets, just recently released on the Domo label. He says that it is a deeply personal album — a “heartfelt album” — arising from the deaths of both of his parents this year. But he said it also has songs about “love found and love lost”. He played several selections from the album, as well as older works, at the Friday night concert.

Joining Armstrong in the trio are German bassist Volker Nahrman and drummer Jose Duque. Nahrman performed with a hand-carved, 100-year-bass and a modern, electric bass, as well as several other instruments. Duque demonstrated his ability to beat out a rhythm on just about any surface.

The Randy Armstrong Trio played to a standing ovation on Friday night, showing that Franklin crowds can appreciate the blend of old and new, foreign and American, in music.

Armstrong’s No Regrets CD is available at major national chains, including Borders, Barnes and Noble, and other outlets. Information on Armstrong and his trio is available online at www.randyarmstrong.com.