FIDDLIN' AROUND

Saline Fiddlers Philharmonic

Vol. 8 No. 3 Jan-Feb, 2002

Austin Trio To Appear With Saline Fiddlers

Welcome Hot Club!

By Will Warner

Call this the year of the "hot club." At November's Fiddlers Philharmonic Hometown Concerts, Randy Sabien and Brian Torff presented their tribute to Stephane Grappelli's *Quintette du Hot Club de France*. The February 1st and 2nd concerts will feature a trio from Austin, Texas, called "Hot Club of Cowtown."

The trio comprises fiddler Elana Fremerman, picker Whit Smith and bassist Jake Erwin. Their eclectic repertoire threads together western swing and jazz, in what David Bothner of the Ann Arbor News calls "a bridge between the hot jazz playing of Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grappelli, and the western swing of Bob Wills." (Just for reference, another reviewer notes that Bob Wills is to western swing what the Earl of Sandwich is to lunchtime.)

The group will take the second half of two shows at "hoedown high" (Saline High School) as part of the 8th annual Fiddlers Philharmonic Hometown Concert series. As usual, Saline's own Fiddlers Philharmonic and Fiddle Clubs will open the shows.

In demand beyond the Austin city limits, the Hot Club has appeared on NPR's *All Things Considered* and *A Prairie Home Companion*, the Millennium stage at the Kennedy Center in Washington, and recently at the Ark in Ann Arbor. They come to Saline between gigs at the Livestock Show and Rodeo in Austin and the Cowboy Poetry and Music Festival in Santa Clarita, CA. (Their Kennedy Center webcast can still be seen on your computer at the Kennedy Center website *www.kennedy-center.org/programs/millennium/artist_details.cfm?artist_id=HCCOWTOWN*)

All three members of the band came to their present repertoire relatively recently. Elana played classical violin from age five and studied at Barnard College and the Manhattan School of Music. She met Whit through an ad in the music classifieds of the *Village Voice*. Whit and Jake originally saw themselves as rock 'n' rollers (but found they were capable of more than three cords?).



Hot Club members Elana Fremerman, Whit Smith and Jake Erwin.

The band added singing to their show when fans asked them if they could. Whit and Elana split the singing duties. Elana's vocal style, punch-pulling but not tentative, makes you think of a self-confident and less breathy Blossom Dearie.

The Fiddlers themselves will be freshly returned from their gig as headliners at the Midwestern Clinic, a conference of music educators in Chicago. Part of the Chicago show will be reprised in February along with some new treats for the audiences. One hundred members of the 6th, 7th and 8th grade Fiddle Clubs will kick off the concerts with their earnest interpretations of some traditional American classics.

CONCERT INFORMATION:

February 1st and 2nd, 7:30 PM
Saline High School Auditorium
7190 N. Maple Road in Saline
$12 for adults and $5 for students up to grade 12
All seating is reserved.
To book tickets, call (734) 429-7210

Behind-The-Scenes
at the Saline Fiddlers Hometown Concert

By Will Warner

Backstage at Saline High School is a paint-splattered room where students learn to construct stage sets. Late on a Saturday night in November, this room is the scene of another kind of lesson. Two professional guitarists, after an evening of performing, are performing again. Their hands move seemingly without effort in the practiced ease of the professional. The audience this time is mostly members of the Fiddlers rhythm section, drawn away from their after-concert chores by the strains of the impromptu jam session.

Preparations for the events that culminated in the above scene were well underway a week earlier. On the previous Sunday, while the Fiddlers rehearsed, 19 moms and one dad gathered to assign tasks for the week of the Hometown Concert.

A major topic was the pre-performance potluck feast for the evening of the first concert. Each instrumental section took a food group: violins to bring salads and side dishes, violas and cellos to provide desserts, rhythm to furnish bread. Mrs. Frank's food committee would provide an entrée of fried chicken. Food for the Fiddlers is always a major undertaking. Be sure to bring enough! You can't have too much fried chicken!



Guest Artist, Randy Sabien

Randy Sabien, jazz violinist and concert headliner, spent the week of the shows as artist-in-residence in the Saline schools' music department teaching the kids "improv" techniques. Randy stayed with his longtime friends Fiddlers Director and Manager Bob and Pam Philips, talking and working into the wee hours. Not ones to waste an opportunity, writing partners Bob and Randy worked out their next book.

When school let out on Wednesday—Halloween—the Fiddlers' junior gaffers (Eleanor, Christina, Linda, Jessie and the most of rest of the group) reported to the high school auditorium. They joined the sound team of Dan, Mr. Newton and Assistant Director Ben Culver for the exacting four-hour effort to set up and wire the stage. With copious amounts of gaffer tape and junk food, the crew carefully positioned the microphones and speakers and wired them to a new sound mixing board behind blackout curtains at the back of the auditorium. The actual sound check would wait until Friday.



Mr. Newton prepares the sound system

Late Friday afternoon, a minivan with Wisconsin plates backed up to the high school. Its occupants were the rest of the professional musicians. Out came Bassist Brian Torff and guitarists Mike Dowling and Cliff Fredriksen. Introductions were made and their equipment taken backstage.



Bases at the ready!

On stage, the Fiddlers progressed through sound check. Randy and Brian watched from seats in the house, Randy gesturing, Brian attentive. The sound team, all business, directed the musicians—penlights, tape and markers all in play.

Meanwhile, in the cafeteria, the meal planned on the previous Sunday began to arrive. Dish by dish, plate by plate, food came and found a place in the buffet. A scrumptious Midwestern potluck materialized, anchored by six great, steaming pans of fried chicken. With the sound checks now complete, the kids and their parents dug in.

The pace of activity freshened.

Across the cafeteria, 100 members of the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade Fiddle Clubs—farm teams for the Fiddlers—began to gather. Their leader, Erin Hansen, in blue jeans and white shirt like her charges, corralled them into chairs and led them in tuning. Bob Philips added some last-minute instruction and encouragement. In another corner, Mrs. Owczarzak pulled together and decorated tables for the after-concert reception, arranged plates of cookies dropped off by Fiddle Club parents, and made punch.

Out in the hallway Mrs. Byers deployed her team of Fiddler moms, all ravishing in black and white, to setup and stock the sales tables. In a cold draft by the doors, Mrs. Smith established a portable ticket booth.

Inside the auditorium, Mrs. Lambarth and Mrs. Midkiff double-checked their stage decorations. Their 50-foot scroll depicting a musical staff and notes faced the audience from the front edge of the stage.

At last Bob Phillips, Miss Hansen and Ben Culver, like pied pipers, led two columns of Fiddle Club musicians onto the stage and the 8th annual Hometown Concert began.

Continued on page 6. See BEHIND THE SCENE

Passing of the Tourch: An Era is Ending

A Tribute to Linda Jones

By Anne Kirvan (former Fiddler mom)

The final mom from the first group of Philharmonic musicians is retiring from her role as booking manager. Linda Jones, whose daughter Kelly was in the rhythm section before her 1998 SHS graduation, was in on original visionary conversations regarding Fiddlers and helped arrange gigs to play for (just about) anyone who would listen. She also participated in fund-raising efforts to launch the Saline Fiddlers Philharmonic on its first White House holiday performance.

"Occasionally I will get a promising idea, but ideas produce jobs and a lot of times it's just easier and quicker to do a job than to explain it to someone else or ask them to take time from their busy schedules" Linda said a few years back when asked about her role as a Fiddler mom. Stemming from that approach and her commitment to Fiddlers, Linda helped with anything and everything. Linda recalls exclaiming at one of the early brainstorming sessions, "Let's play at the White House!" Everyone who knows Director Bob Phillips is aware that, :no river is too wide, no ocean too deep...", so Linda tucked that White House idea under her hat and went on with the smaller tasks at hand. After a few years, when the group had grown in popularity and demand and had a couple of first-rate CDs released, Linda dusted off the White House idea. Phone calls, letters, e-mails, recordings and then more! A national venue became Linda's—and the group's— mission. She was determined that if there were anyway for the Fiddlers to perform in the White House, it would be found. And so it was. The first White House holiday concert was in 1997. The Fiddlers were invited back in 1998, the only student group ever asked to perform there twice. As it turned out, Fiddlers made a total of five trips, in five years, to one stage or another in Washington, D.C.

D.C., Florida, the National Bluegrass Festival in Oklahoma, Scotland, England, Northern Michigan, Nashville, Northwestg America... Linda feels that it's time for a new personal chapter. "I don't know the kids at all anymore," she explained. "There is a great group of parents now that is going to take over and improve on what I do. I'm especially excited about the Web site. It's going to the hands of a woman who works in the profession." Linda said. Linda put Fiddlers' information on-line, with a Web site address and Web page when most people had no knowledge of today's mainstream information highway. Linda didn't necessarily grasp it all either, but true to her usual determination, she figured it out by trial and error and a little (or a lot!) of help from her friends.

As far as what is in store next for Linda, she said, "I would like to be a master of something rather than being a jack-of-all-trades. I don't know what exactly it is I want to do but I'm having lots of fun with community education improvisational acting classes. I love the comedy." Travel is also on the docket. Linda's husband, Mark, retired last spring from the Ann Arbor Police Department. Since then, Linda and Mark have taken trips to New York and Chicago. Going to the theatre is high on their list of activities with comedy shows at the top.



Linda Jones

Even though Linda is stepping away from Fiddlers, she will always hold dear her true reason for extended involvement. "Seeing the kids develop individually and knowing that the skills they learn through Fiddlers will impact them throughout their lives is what has kept me interested." Linda explained. "By graduation, they can all carry a conversation with virtually anyone, they are poised in front of a crowd, they are confident and possess a self-awareness that few young people have the opportunity to develop to this level in high school."

Linda has played a vital role in the overall success of Fiddlers. Her tireless effort has set a high standard for the parent volunteer group. Many, many thanks Linda, from all of us. You're a treasure.

Editor's note: Linda Jones officially retired from her position as Booking Manager in December 2001. Linda also personally produced all aspects of Fiddlin' Around until September 2001. Five parents are replacing her on this job alone! You can read her latest story on page 5 of this issue.



Fiddler Dusk Dancers

Saline Fiddlers' Sponsorship Program

By Linda Jones

Serendipitous best describes the beginnings of the Saline Fiddlers' sponsor program over seven years ago. The basic idea came from a casual suggestion at an early brain-storming session. The initial approach to community members met with unexpected approval. Fortuitously, the program grew with each ensuing year and now, is a prosperous part of the support structure for the nationally recognized program.

In 1994, as Bob Phillips, Fiddlers' Founder and Director, began to move his vision of Fiddlers Philharmonic from the drawing board in his mind to the performance floor, he enlisted the assistance of several people. First there were the original 20 students who became the Founding Fiddlers - bringing their musical talents, their voluntary time and their enthusiasm in Bob's vision of a student fiddling ensemble dedicated to performing and preserving traditional American fiddle music. Bob secured the aid and skills of his wife Pam as Fiddler's Business Manager, ad hoc den mother and jack of all trades. Finally, he asked several parents to fill various operating and advisory positions.

One of the first meetings was a brain storming session among Bob, Pam and a half dozen parents. Ideas flew across the table. Organizational structure, performance venues, costumes and travel were all considered. One of the other important topics addressed was "funding". Who suggested the idea for a sponsor program is lost to history, but in the fall of 1994 Wendy Kivi and this writer took on the task of finding local business people who would be willing to take a leap of faith and put up $25.00 each as initial operating funds for the Fiddlers.

We had our facts in hand - the who, whats and whys - the information that we hoped would convince people to support a new, previously untried venture. In retrospect, the sell was surprisingly easy. In one afternoon, we secured assistance from 18 sponsors and had the basis of our operating funds. Many of those initial sponsors are still part of the Fiddlers' family.

One of the first to sign on was Tom Kirvan and *The Saline Reporter*. "The Reporter has always been supportive of school activities in general and the music program in particular has been a very important element to the community," says Tom. "We could see the promise that the Fiddlers' program possessed, especially with the leadership of Bob and Pam Phillips. We knew it would take off and were more than glad to give the group an initial boost." The Reporter has also been able to assist with some of the groups' printing needs and other sponsorship efforts. "We've followed the program since the beginning and have enjoyed being part of its continued evolution."

Also among the first to offer financial support was Benny Galimberti of Benny's Bakery. Of the many reasons, Benny, who has been a sponsor since1994, says. "#1: I've known Mr. Phillips since day one; #2, when you live in a musical family you don't say 'no' to anything that has to do with music; and #3, the kids are having a great time expanding their education with their music and traveling. They get in a lot of good practice and learn more about music. It's been a good thing - I could go on - do you want more?" he asks with a smile.

Carol Burmeister who at the time was making dinnertime easier for Salinians with her, *I'll Fix Dinner Tonight*, personal catering service says, "I knew their leader was wonderful. He doesn't do anything that isn't up to snuff."

Tom and Sue MacCartney owners of Tom Mac's Photography also helped out in those early days. Instead of making a monetary donation, Tom took the first official photos, exchanging them for sponsorship status. "We tend to do things because we are a part of the community, " says Tom. "We always backed anything with the high school kids. We knew a lot of Fiddlers and we knew Bob well too - we had our own kids in violin over the years. I thoroughly enjoy the Fiddlers and over the years many have come in for senior pictures. They are a good group of kids and deserve support."

As more people attended performances and learned about the group, questions concerning giving financial support popped up. By the time of the first hometown concert in February, 1995 arrived we borrowed the idea of a sponsor envelope from Jeff Daniels and The Purple Rose Theatre and set a more formalized program into practice. People wishing to become Fiddlers' sponsors could choose a level with which they felt comfortable and make a donation on an annual basis.

With the adoption of our multi-level program our family of sponsors grew. In the first year we more than doubled the number of sponsors. More Saline businesses became part of the program as did many others including the extended family members of the Fiddlers, teachers and school administrators. But what was perhaps the most surprising and most gratifying was the number of people who have become enthusiastic sponsors who have absolutely no connection to Saline or the kids. You expect parents, grandparents and friends to be supportive, but the number of people without direct connections is still mind-boggling. These people obviously were entertained by the Fiddlers and encouraged by the scope of the program as well as the positive example set by the students. The Fiddlers have always been their own best advertisement. Whether because of their music, their personalities or the future they represent, our sponsors have always responded to the honesty and enthusiasm of the young people who are, The Saline Fiddlers.

Due to the number of people who have shared in the sponsorship of the group since 1994, it would be impossible to make a list and not inadvertently omit a name. To avoid just such a mistake, Saline Fiddlers, the directors and volunteers would like to say "Thank You!" to all of our current 200+ sponsors, as well as to all of those from years past. Your continued belief in this program and these wonderful young people is greatly appreciated, as are your contributions to the preservation of a true American art form.

"Words" Describe the Fiddlers' Trip to Chicago

By Barb Radloff

"Phenomenal, extraordinary, and astonishing" were the reactions from music educators to the Fiddlers Philharmonic performance at the Midwest Clinic in Chicago on December 18-20, 2001. The Midwest Clinic, an international band and orchestra conference, hosted thousands of music educators at Chicago's Hilton Hotel and Towers. The clinic honors excellence in music education so Superintendent Barbara Saxton, High School Principal Joe Rossi and their spouses joined the Fiddlers on the trip.The Fiddlers' feature performance in the Grand Ballroom included many of their favorite tunes including *Blackberry Blossom, Vladimir's Steamboat, Olympic Reel,* and *The Orange Blossom Special.* Randy Sabien, jazz violinist and friend of the Fiddlers, shared the stage during *Sweet Georgia Brown.*



Bob with daughter Sarah

"Cool" was how one of the Fiddlers described the reaction from the Naperville Public Schools fifth grade orchestras to the Fiddlers performance for them. The Fiddlers took a side-trip to Naperville, Illinois, where Fiddler alumni Sarah Phillips Lenhert teaches the fifth-grade orchestras. After their performance, the Naperville students rewarded the Fiddlers with hugs and high-fives. The Fiddlers were almost overwhelmed with the star-like response the students showered on them.

"The best clinic ever" was the reaction to the clinic that Fiddlers' assistant director Ben Culver and director Bob Phillips taught at the conference to 500-600 music educators. Under the direction of Mr. Culver, the Fiddlers demonstrated their ability to learn a new tune totally by ear in about three minutes. Once the song was learned, members of the group added character to the tune by adding layers and depth as well as improvisation. In addition, the group demonstrated many types of fiddling tunes including bluegrass, celtic, and swing. The clinic was highlighted by a performance of *Limerock* by current Fiddler Brad and Fiddler alumni Barney Culver.



Naperville School Children

"Awesome" was the reaction of many of the Fiddlers to the visit they made to the Museum of Science and Industry. The group was able to explore the inner works of a full size 727 airplane as well as an original German submarine captured during World War II. The original Howdy Doody was on loan from the Detroit Institute of Art for the Fiddlers to view. In addition, the Fiddlers were able to take in the Chicago Museum of Art as well as shopping on the Magnificent Mile.



The Fidders' enjoyed the ineraction with the children.

"Tired and proud" was how the parents that accompanied this high energy group felt upon their return. The three-day trip that included three performances, eight movements of equipment and instruments, late night pizza parties, and early morning breakfast was well worth the effort. The thirty-four students that make up this group continue to represent Saline and the Saline Area Schools in a remarkable manner.

Fiddler Calendar

February

Friday and Saturday, February 1 and 2: The 8th Annual Hometown Concert. Joining the Fiddlers and the Fiddle Clubs will be special guest artists, The Hot Club of Cowtown. 7:30 p.m. in the Saline High School. Tickets cost $12.00 for adults and $5.00 for students (12th grade and under). Tickets can be purchased at the Saline Community Education Office in Union School or by calling Sherry at: 734-429-7210.

March

Friday, March 1: Annual fundraiser to support Saline's sister city relationship with Brecon, Wales. Call Joan Roth at 734-429-4068 for tickets.

Tuesday, March 26: Washtenaw County/MSU Extension Annual Dairy and Livestock Banquet. Chelsea High School. This is a private event for members and guests only.

Behind the Scene

Continued from page 2

By tradition, the extended Fiddlers family gathers for a "cast party" after the first of the Hometown concert shows. So the whole crew reconvened at the home of one of them, there to find another buffet including two heaping pans of leftover fried chicken. The kids unwound with foosball and a movie, while their parents conferred, conversed and otherwise hobnobbed.

Saturday was a repeat of Friday, but with a different ending. As the crowd melted away, teardown began. The crew coiled and counted the huge mass of equipment into trunks and bags. The effort flowed smoothly, with the feel of a movie running in reverse. As the job wound down, junior gaffers batted around balls of tape.

Softly, the Dobro guitar's twang wafts in from backstage. Fiddlers drift away, pushing past the upstage curtains and into the light of the paint-splattered room. Mike Dowling sits with the instrument across his knees, stroking it. Cliff Fredriksen accompanies on another guitar. Young pickers watch and listen. Rarely still and rarely quiet, they are still and quiet now.

The backstage buffet is down to half a bag of Oreos and a heaping pan of leftover fried chicken. But nobody is eating.



Saline Fiddlers Philharmonic 2001-2002

SALINE FIDDLERS PHILHARMONIC

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Publication Manager: Jen Lahnala
Desktop Publishing: Margo Douthat

Postage for this newsletter was
Provided by John Sickler, Citimortgage
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