

Rob Fried shifts his focus from business to his family and his music.

by JUNE S. APRIL

If you watch Rob Fried play is double bass, then listen to the music he has composed, it's like a mirror of his being. The realization that you're tapping your feet or fingers along with his rhythms speaks volumes about how strongly he connects to both people and music.

Fiercely passionate, Rob Fried gives of himself totally to whatever he does. At age 43, this creative man has turned his life onto a new road. After 19 years of being a very successful businessman, he has shifted his priorities and is now focusing on the two parts of his life that mean the most to him — his family and his music.

What with both parents playing instruments at home, there was no question in young Rob's mind that music was an essential part of the joy of life. Starting out with piano and trumpet lessons, by age eight, Rob felt a particular draw to the guitar, the instrument that his mother played. Five years later he co-founded a funk rock band, To the Max, which performed throughout Fairfield County. In high school, the band's bassist left the group and by default (and because he was drawn to it), Rob shifted his musical abilities to the bass.

Born at St. Vincent's Hospital this lanky man is a native "Fairfieldian." After graduating from Andrew Warde High School, Rob followed the lead of some of his peers and "hit the musical road," but he honored his parents' request to continue his education and studied at the University of Connecticut for the next four years. "I decided to go out to Eugene, Ore.," he said, "to get my MBA in Finance, and even took some graduate classes in linguistics and philosophy while at the University of Oregon.

To finance his education, Rob went door to door, selling books during summers. The benefits proved to be more than

monetary. "I learned how to sell myself," he acknowledged, "which proved to be an asset in my business career."

Returning to Connecticut, Rob got a job with a small investment management firm, Bridgewater Associates. Within 12 years, he became a partner in the firm and was a major force in "growing" the business from zero to \$35 billion of assets under management. "We were responsible for managing the pension funds of very large corporations," he explained, "and we became one of the true success stories in the history of investment management for private investment boutiques."

Throughout the 1980's, Rob said he would periodically pull out his guitar, but in 1992 a concert changed his thinking about what music meant to him. "I heard bassist Toni Cimorosi, but it was more than just listening to a fine musician," Rob noted. "I felt compelled to rekindle and expand my interest in that instrument." So began the groundwork for career #2.

"Around 1995, I made a commitment to practice one thousand hours over the next five years and see where that would take me," Rob stated. Studying with Toni Cimorosi and playing in a number of bands and working on composing his own music brought Rob to the realization that he needed to make some major life changes. With the support of his devoted wife Diane, in May 2002, Rob Fried, prosperous businessman, switched suits to Rob Fried, musical artist.

Though he admits to having loved the challenges of his high power, seven-day-a-week job in the finance field, he now admits to "waking up in the morning and wanting to be engaged with music." "On one level, it's just plain fun, to work on my technique, or listen to music, repair my instruments and learn new songs," Rob said, "but on another level, it seems

a way in which I can make a contribution."

Rob's vision is to flourish as a freelance bassist and vocalist, playing with one of the five bands he is involved with at music festivals, good music clubs and important social and charity functions. "Some light touring would be of interest," he said and being part of the New Orleans Jazz Fest would be a life's dream realized.

Founded about two years ago, Bone Dry (which will be opening for B.B. King and the Fabulous Thunderbirds on Sept. 1 at the Ives Center in Danbury) plays music that Rob describes as "acoustic/electric rock and blues with a groove." Original music is combined with pieces by well-known artists. "We usually improvise when we play other people's music," he explains, "so that we still have a distinctive quality to what we perform." The band frequently plays at the Redding Roadhouse and has a web site so people can get information on the when and where (www.bonedryband.com).

Jazz plays a major role in Rob's musical world, ergo the formation of another group, Rob Fried and Friends. Their focus is the exploration of the jazz medium. Listening to some of Rob's compositions, one hears strong jazz harmonies.

Rob also plays with Stoneband. If you check the web site for Stoneband, www.thestoneband.com, there is listed not only background information on the members, but the CD they have created. Soulful rock and mostly original songs composed by the members is what Stoneband is about.

Basically Beatles is another group with whom Rob performs. As its name suggests, the band not only sounds quite a bit like the Liverpool group, but plays in the same keys and does the same musical arrangements. "Doug Lees of the Wingnuts

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founded the group," Rob pointed out, "and invited me to join to play bass." The group has afforded Fried the opportunity to study Paul McCartney's music more closely. And playing songs like "Hey Jude," "Penny Lane" and other Beatles originals gives Rob a thrill.

He is a student of and plays with Georgia Louis's group. In addition to her fame for smoking meats and delicious homemade chocolates, Georgia Louis (formerly of Redding) is also a voice teacher specializing in Gospel and Spirituals. Musical godchild of the incomparable Louis Armstrong, Georgia has a following of people who love to hear her sing, and a large number of students. In addition to being her pupil, Rob plays with

her group, Georgia Louis & Friends. Rob finds that playing gospel music "fertilizes" the rest of his playing. "It shows how music needs to come from the heart," he said, after a moment of reflection.

With such a volume of musical involvements how does Rob Fried make time for the other priority in his life, his family? Since he has built a recording studio in his new home in Redding, Rob is frequently there to see his children and is available to "taxi" them around and help cook meals.

Rob and Diane have three daughters, eight-year-old Emily, five-year-old Rachel, and three-year-old Sarah. The older two study piano and Rob helps them understand what they are doing. Both par-

ents encourage regular practicing.

Trained as a dancer, Diane Fried teaches Hot Shoes Dance in Ridgefield.

Age and experience has created an enlightened philosophy of life for Rob Fried. He cherishes his friends and family and seeks to have an open and forthright communication with those he interacts with. "We must communicate directly," he said emphatically, "and live from the heart as well as the head." For him, music is also about recovering the sense of play that a child has, and sharing the process of creativity. Smiling, he closed the interview admitting that he frequently reaffirms that his goals now are not to be so ambitious, but to simply see what opportunities life brings.