

Sounds of Exotic Locales

By Tom Huntington

Free Press Correspondent

Burlington area residents seeking refuge from the frozen throes of mid-winter Vermont can escape to some exotic locales — sonically speaking, anyway — Friday at FlynnSpace, where New England duo 35th Parallel brings its self-described “Mediterranean jazz” sounds for a two-set show that will also feature several guest musicians.

Consisting of Middlesex tabla standout Gabe Halberg, 31, and New Hampshire multi-instrumentalist Mac Ritchey, 32 — who plays everything from oud and bouzouki to acoustic guitar and didjeridoo — 35th Parallel draws its name from the latitudinal line that informs its border-crossing, world fusion blend. Middle Eastern, Mediterranean and North African folk flavors are tossed into the stew along with North Indian classical music, subtle hints of roots music from the southern United States and a free-wheeling jazz sensibility driven by a love of improvisation.

The duo is riding high on acclaim for its debut CD, “The Green Vine,” one of the best Vermont CDs of 2003 and one of the most distinctive discs to come out of the Green Mountain State in recent memory. The twosome seduces with a gorgeous arrangement of a traditional “Armenian Wedding Dance” and such stunning original compositions as the hypnotic “Eracinos” and “Folk Tune” and the frisky “Crabwalk Often?”

Halberg, a 1995 Goddard College graduate who studied tabla at the Ali Akbar College of Music in California, said the spark for most of the duo’s instrumental material comes out of jam sessions and by “letting the sonic nature of our instruments really guide us in terms of what we’re playing.”

“A lot of our compositions have come about from just the individual voice of a certain instrument,” said Halberg, who also plays the pakhawaj — a double-headed drum that some believe to be the predecessor of the tabla — in addition to other percussion instruments. “Some of our tunes are more set than others, but there’s a ton of improvisation to what we do, and that’s what keeps it interesting for us. That’s what the music is



35th Parallel

If you go

WHO: 35th Parallel

WHEN: 8 p.m. Friday.

WHERE: FlynnSpace, Burlington.

TICKETS: \$13 adults, \$8 students. All ages. 863-5966.

ALSO March 4, Starlight Lounge, Waitsfield. (888) 212-1142.

largely about, the interaction between Mac and I and just feeding off each other’s energy and ideas.”

Halberg and Ritchey will perform as a duo during the first set of the FlynnSpace show. For the second set, the two will be joined by a trio of Vermont horn players who first made their mark on the

Green Mountain scene in the 1990s with jazz-funk favorites viperHouse — Michael Chorney on baritone sax, Brian Boyes on trumpet and Zach Tonnissen on soprano sax — and Brattleboro percussionist Todd Roach. Halberg said the second set would consist of a couple 35th Parallel compositions in addition to traditional Turkish and Armenian tunes, covers by modern Middle Eastern composers such as Sudanese oud master Hamza el Din and genre-bending Lebanese oud player Rabiha Abou-Khalil, and “a few sections of just improv.”

“It’s really exciting for me to be playing with these guys in this setting,” Halberg said. “To wed those fat horn grooves to what 35th Parallel is doing right now is really exciting.”

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