

Mp3 Jeff Midkiff - Partners In Time



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Eclectic mix of jazz, bluegrass, classical and swing using acoustic mandolin, fiddle, guitar, bass and percussion. 10 MP3 Songs JAZZ: Traditional Jazz Combo, COUNTRY: Bluegrass Details: SOME REVIEW'S OF PARTNERS IN TIME MARTIN BRADY, Nashville Scene writes: Midkiff has been a serious musician and educator for years. He's distinguished himself as a regular in various bluegrass groups, but until now hasn't had a solo podium to fully exhibit his technical virtuosity. His debut CD is a beauty, showcasing his clean, dynamic mandolin playing as well as his rich and tasteful approach as a fiddler. Midkiff authored six of the 10 selections, displaying an eclectic sensibility that takes the listener from good-time folkie rave-ups ("Grey Hawk") and traditional lyricism ("Goodbye Liza Jane") to more exotic realms ("Alhambra"). Midkiff also serves up Reinhardt-esque treatments of Tin Pan Alley standbys like "Summertime" and "Oh, Lady Be Good," then closes with a rousing cover of "Monroe's Hornpipe." 2003 is the year he stepped out into the limelight, and judging by this effort, it's about time. BRENDA HOUGH, California Bluegrass Association writes: Jeff Midkiff started playing mandolin while growing up in Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains and won several contests before he was a teenager. He later played with the Lonesome River Band and the Shankman Twins and earned music degrees in college. His versatility is highlighted in this debut album that features Jeff's own tunes as well as some classics from bluegrass and Gershwin. The ensemble playing of Jeff on mandolin, Curtis Jones on guitar, Robbie Link on bass and Bill Ray on percussion let these songs reach out and capture the ear of the listener. "A Visit From The Muse" is a melodic journey with the mandolin joined by rhythm guitar and fiddle. "Funk Tango" is an exciting blend of South American rhythms with some Grisman-style mandolin punctuation. The group romps through the bluegrass standard, "Goodbye Liza Jane" and the classic "Monroe's Hornpipe." The two Gershwin songs are six minute forays into jazz with a flowing guitar and rumbling bass solo. Jeff has

certainly followed his musical muse and produced some mandolin magic with no musical boundaries. JON WEISBERGER writes: "I've been musically schizophrenic my entire life," Jeff Midkiff says with a laugh. "It's been a problem, and it's still a problem - but I think it's a good problem." A mandolinist and fiddler raised on bluegrass and a professional clarinetist, Midkiff squares the musical circle on his debut solo recording, and the CD offers convincing proof that in his case, at least, a split musical personality is a good thing indeed. Filled with memorable original melodies and a selection of vintage tunes by composers ranging from Bill Monroe to George Ira Gershwin, *Partners In Time* reflects a broad-ranging sensibility that's all too rare in today's compartmentalized musical world. Born in Roanoke, VA in 1963, Jeff Midkiff grew up in an area where bluegrass and traditional string band music thrived. Given his first mandolin at the age of 7 by a neighbor (Sherman Poff, to whose memory *Partners In Time* is dedicated), he moved quickly into the world of fiddlers' conventions and contests, winning his first mandolin competition before reaching his teens. As he grew older, he added the fiddle to his instrumental arsenal and joined the New Grass Revue-yet at the same time, he took up the clarinet and began to perform with his high school's symphonic band. By the time he graduated he had his sights firmly set on a musical career, and in 1981 Midkiff began studies at Virginia Tech, eventually earning a degree in music education and performance. Yet even as he was immersing himself in the classical repertoire, he continued to gain attention as a mandolin and fiddle player with the McPeak Brothers, a widely respected bluegrass group with whom he made his first serious recording in 1982 (5 selections from that album are included on Rebel Records' *McPeak Brothers: Classic Bluegrass* CD). For the remainder of the decade, Midkiff continued to pursue both aspects of his musical career. In 1983 he joined the Lonesome River Band, which would eventually become one of bluegrass's most acclaimed groups. For the next five years, as he completed his education and started working as a music instructor, he performed with the LRB, recording two albums with the group, including its self-titled Rebel Records debut in 1987. Shortly after that, he enrolled in graduate school at Northern Illinois University, earning his Master's degree in clarinet at the end of the decade-but though the move meant leaving the LRB, he continued to perform with an Illinois bluegrass band, *Bluegrass Express*. The beginning of the 1990s found Jeff putting both aspects of his performing career on hold while his career as an educator moved to the fore. "I went a good five years without opening my mandolin case," he notes, "and as a full-time teacher in northern Virginia, I wasn't playing much clarinet, either." An appearance with the Annapolis Chamber Orchestra at Carnegie Hall

reawakened his passion for the latter, and in 1995 he moved to the Chicago area to revive his performance career-on the clarinet only, he thought, but ultimately on the mandolin and fiddle, too. Busy as a clarinetist with area ensembles and as a youth orchestra conductor and educator, he was drafted in 1998 by The Schankman Twins, a California-based bluegrass duo now signed to Rounder Records. Midkiff began touring with them, and as his immersion in the bluegrass world grew, he began to think once again of recording his own project. "As far back as when I was with the Lonesome River Band I thought it would be cool to do an album," Jeff says, "but I didn't really think about it seriously until a couple of years ago, after I'd been playing with the Schankman Twins for a while. Curtis Jones was their guitar player, and he and I spent our off-time together playing a lot of different kinds of music. He was writing a lot, too, and there was just a lot of creativity in the air. I had written one tune when I was a teenager, but hadn't written any music since. All of a sudden I was getting these ideas for tunes, and as soon as I started getting creative, I thought, I need to start recording." Partners In Time is the result of that determination, and not surprisingly, Midkiff drew Jones in as guitarist for the album, while turning to an old friend-the Lonesome River Band's Tim Austin, by now one of bluegrass's busiest studio owners and recording engineers-for assistance in making the project a reality. "Curtis has been a real inspiration to me and a catalyst as well," he says, "and I can't say enough about the way Tim went above and beyond the call of duty, too. He's the one who recommended Robbie Link to play bass on the album. He said, 'He plays your kind of stuff,'" Jeff says with a chuckle, "and that's pretty rare. What I'm doing here, going across all these genres, isn't something just anybody is going to be able to do, but Robbie really laid it down." For percussion parts, Midkiff turned to an old Virginia Tech friend, jazz drummer Bill Ray. At the center of the album are a half-dozen original compositions that reflect that creative burst, as well as the varied sources of Midkiff's creativity and musical experiences. "'Alhambra' is the oldest tune on the album, while 'Partners In Time' was written this past summer, so it's the most recent," he notes. "'Grey Hawk' was written after I left the Winterhawk bluegrass festival one year; the festival was changing its name to Grey Fox, so I combined the two for its title. That one pretty much popped into my head all at once. 'Etheria,' on the other hand, took a long time. I was listening to a recording of Itzhak Perlman playing the Bach E major Partita, and it started me thinking about what I could do that would combine my classical ideas and my mandolin playing." Rounding out the album are four covers that pay more direct homage to Jeff's inspirations. "Curtis and I have played a lot of Django Reinhardt's music together," he observes,

"and 'Lady Be Good' and 'Summertime' are two we really like to do. 'Summertime' has always been one of my favorite tunes, whether out of Porgy Bess or a jazz setting or even a bluegrass version. The other two are reflections of my earliest days as a bluegrass player and the environment I grew up in. 'Liza Jane' is a traditional tune I knew from childhood, but I don't remember having actually done it until one day not too long ago. I started playing the tune and thought that with a little bit of arrangement, it would be really neat. I thought the album needed something that was really traditional but also showed where I am now musically. 'Monroe's Hornpipe' is a tune that Dempsey Young of the Lost Found-he was my first mandolin teacher-showed me when I was a kid. I wanted to play something fast on the album, and I always liked that one, so it was a natural choice." With its deft, thoughtful blend of classical, bluegrass, jazz and swing influences, Partners In Time is an outstanding debut by a musician who feels comfortable in more than one setting-not only musically, but personally as well. "This album started off as just a document of who I am musically, but once I came to terms with all that I realized this is really what I want to do. I feel at home in the Blue Ridge Mountains playing fiddle tunes," Jeff Midkiff says, "but then again, I associate on a personal and professional level with professors and conductors and orchestral musicians and I feel at home there as well. That's not been without its problems, but it's a good thing. Finally, instead of fighting it, I'm going with it."

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