



## Mandolin player keeps stretching musical roots

**Amanda Sieradzki**  
Council on Culture & Arts

For acoustic musician Mickey Abraham, Michael Jackson comes closest to healing the world through music. He gets chills when the late singer belts about world peace and love because he believes in its sincerity. Maintaining that sense of innocence and authenticity is the driving force in Abraham's career as music from almost every genre imaginable colors his tastes and stylistic influences.

As mandolin player for local group Belle and the Band, the groove and mel-

odies of theme songs catch his ear whether it's the background jingles in video games, the tunes twinkling through amusement park rides, or the opening themes for television shows "Matlock" and "Full House." In fact Abraham fulfilled a childhood dream when the band recently won a Suncoast Emmy Award for their song "Local Routes."

"It came out of nowhere and that's given me a newfound confidence," says Abraham, who is currently gearing up for a collaborative show with pianist

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Mickey Abraham, shown with Belle and the Band, which recently won a Suncoast Emmy Award for their song "Local Routes." JEREMIAH Z STEWART

## Abraham

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Mason Margut on July 20. "To win something like that reminds me I'm doing the right thing in my life."

Abraham began taking piano lessons before discovering the guitar at a young age. His parents stoked his passion for bluegrass as they introduced him to folk music on guitar and banjo. Family gatherings often transformed into sing-alongs, and Abraham would sit for hours practicing tunes until he mastered them.

In high school he was turned onto grunge and rock music in the vein of Pearl Jam and Nirvana, but circled back to bluegrass while working at Gordon's String Music on Monroe Street in college. Though guitar remains his first love, he picked a mandolin off the wall at the shop and soon found an entirely new groove.

"The mandolin sounds like a fluttering butterfly or a pleasant bell," describes Abraham. "And two mandolins together sound like two butterflies hanging out," he adds with a touch of whimsy.

He credits Gordon for teaching him everything about bluegrass, accompanying him to festivals and playing many gigs at The Warehouse. Abraham's personal style is often termed as "newgrass," which boils down to music played on acoustic instruments like mandolins, fiddles, banjos, guitars, and basses. He holds the history of bluegrass in high regard however, and treasures the traditions that Gordon passed along to him.

"Gordon was my mentor in the acoustic music scene," says Abraham. "He taught me hundreds of tunes, introduced me to a ton of people, and I felt like I was part of a family immediately. He's a Tallahassee bluegrass legend."

Though Abraham graduated from Florida State with a degree in creative writing, he immediately discovered his own passion for teaching music. Learning from instructional videos, he would practice with his friends' bands, teaching them guitar lines and sharing new information. He says nothing felt more right, and 20 years later still exudes just as much excitement as he did during his very first lesson.

In Tallahassee, he teaches privately, and has also shared his mandolin and guitar knowledge at festivals like the Suwanee Roots Revival. He's published in Flatpicking Guitar Magazine for a decade and was an instructor for middle schools and the Tallahassee Youth Orchestras. Notably, Abraham valued giving his students real world exposure to bluegrass by taking them to festivals to having them learn "twenty lessons in one" from some of the world's leading musicians.

"I try to have endless patience and put my mind into

## If you go

**What:** Mason Margut & Mickey Abraham

**When:** 7-9 p.m., Friday, July 20

**Where:** Northside Community Center, 8005 Oak Grove Road

**Cost:** Free

**Contact:** For more information, call 850-404-0015 or visit <http://www.facebook.com/events/380941519069060/>.

the minds of the students and what they want to achieve," says Abraham. "I'm never in a rush and I hope that my excitement is infectious. I think that's more important than being a good musician or even a good teacher. Being genuinely excited and passionate...that is the magic."

Abraham gets just as much energy from bubblegum pop as heavy metal and especially enjoys the music that his students turn him onto in order to stay fed and relevant. He sets goals, too, most recently accomplishing an international tour with Belle and the Band and setting his sights on creating a new folk opera concept album with bandmate, Kathryn Belle Long.

"All my licks wouldn't mean anything without her songs," says Abraham. "I'm so inspired right now creatively, even if I don't play as fast or as clean as my musical heroes, I'm extremely confident in my musical melodies and ideas."

For the upcoming show with Margut, Abraham is looking forward to stretching outside his comfort zone as the pair improvises on jazz piano and mandolin respectively. The free concert at Northside Community Center came about after they listened to an album by mandolinist Chris Thile and pianist Brad Mehldau — their favorite artists — which inspired them to try out the new and largely rare conversation between instruments.

Abraham says listening and an open mind will be key ingredients for a successful night, but is mostly grateful for yet another chance to take up his mandolin and experiment. He's never taken a day off or gone out of town without a carrying case, and yet is tirelessly hungry for more opportunities to play, compose, and teach generations of families.

"My success is being around people that make me feel good and I try to return that to them," says Abraham. "I feel like a part of this living, breathing fabric of the community. Tallahassee has become my home."

*Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture ([www.tallahasseearts.org](http://www.tallahasseearts.org)).*