

# ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

## Girardi brings his music to Here's to the Arts

By Jeff Cummins  
Staff Writer

From the first note, Steve Girardi's music possesses an introspective feel that puts the listener in a mood to hear more and more and more.

Girardi, a South Orange resident, is a guitarist who specializes in modern jazz, folk and blues, and his music is so magnetic that it's best to him and his band in a small venue like Maplewood's Here's to the Arts, where Girardi will play two sets with his trio, the Steve Girardi Project, on Saturday at 9 and 10:45 p.m. as part of the series titled MusicLocker Presents Six String Heroes.

Make absolutely no mistake about it, anyone who appreciates jazz should make a point of seeing him in these concerts, particularly since Here's To The Arts is an ideal venue for Girardi's music. There won't be a lot of loud, raucous applause throughout Girardi's performance. Rest assured that, while the band is playing, every person in the audience will be virtually silent, trying to soak in every note of Girardi's music.

Girardi plays both acoustic and electric guitar and his band includes a cellist who gives a distinct flavor to the band's music, which is also best listened to at night, since it inspires such a contemplative mood among listeners. "We have a cellist who basically plays all the melodies and improvises, so it's a jazz thing, but with the cello, it is unique from that stand-



Guitarist Steve Girardi of South Orange brings his unique musical perspective to Maplewood's Here's to the Arts when he and his band, the Steve Girardi Project perform two shows on Saturday as part of the series titled MusicLocker Presents Six String Heroes.

point," said Girardi, who tends to speak the same way he plays, very softly, drawing the other person in the conversation in closer, just exactly what he does with his music. "The

cello is my favorite instrument and I've been a composer playing guitar some 40 years."

Girardi last released "Within Inside," in 2002 with his trio, including Mark Graham on

drums and percussion and Mike Richmond on acoustic bass and cello. This spring, he'll release a new compact disc, "Blue Sky with Tears."

"This band is actually the result of a band that started in the 1980s when I used to play at Maxwell's in Hoboken," Girardi said. "The band was a quartet and it was more of a traditional jazz quartet, meaning drums, bass, guitar and saxophone. There was a great saxophonist who used to play with this band named David MacKenzie. He got married and he moved down to Florida, so that threw a little monkey wrench into that particular band, because he was so prolific a player, kind of reminiscent of a Michael Brecker or a John Coltrane.

"I tried other saxophonists, but I didn't like what they were bringing to the project and, consequently, the band was pretty much a trio for most of the last two decades. I was actually doing one of Michael Locker's gigs about two years ago, and it was well received, but I walked off the stage and I realized this music is just not being presented in the way it should. I realized I needed another instrument and I always loved the cello, so that's what I did.

"Back in the 1970s, I played with a great cellist named Ron Clearfield, who is actually going to be on the new album we're doing. He was classically trained, but he could improvise. I just always loved the collaboration with this guy."

While the cello comes to mind more easily in considering classical music, it definitely adds something to the jazz and that's what listeners can expect to hear on Girardi's new compact disc, which will continue the style his band has used in the past.

"People will hear a real eclectic mix of improvisation, free-style jazz mixed with folk elements, with harmonies that you'd normally hear in a jazz context, but it's done in such a way that I feel it's palatable and well received," Girardi said. "People really enjoy it for its beauty. Being a jazz musician most of my life, the main emphasis can be just the technical playing skills of the individuals. How fast you can play, how many notes you can play. This music is written from more of a compositional sense. Even as prolific as some of the players in this band are, it's not always about showcasing your technical skills."

Here's To The Arts is located at 97 Baker St. Advanced VIP reserved seats for Girardi's performances may be purchased for \$10 each by calling 973-762-2787.

Tickets may also be purchased the night of the event for \$12 apiece. All ticket purchases include a two-drink minimum per person, per show.

For more information, log on to [www.steve-girardi.com](http://www.steve-girardi.com) or send an e-mail to [musiclocker1@yahoo.com](mailto:musiclocker1@yahoo.com).

Jeff Cummins may be reached at [jcummins@thelocalsource.com](mailto:jcummins@thelocalsource.com).