

ARTS & Entertainment

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50 FIVE QUESTIONS WITH...

Billie Tooley

Background: Billie Tooley became the executive director of the New Hampshire Art Association (nhartassociation.org) in August, assuming the responsibility of guiding what is considered the oldest statewide professional art association in the country. The NHAA, based in Portsmouth's Robert Lincoln Levy Gallery, was founded in 1940, and has 400 juried members. She has a background in art, but was in the corporate world of marketing, advertising and public relations prior to taking her current post. The NHAA is about to open the Arts Beyond Sight exhibit.

1 What is your impression of the NHAA membership and the art scene in New Hampshire in general?

Art is alive and thriving in New Hampshire. There is a lot of talent here, as well as a huge number of dedicated artists ... They care deeply, and support efforts to create more opportunities that will allow them to not only interact more with communities, but draw more visitors to our state. Our members are a wonderful group of people open to new ideas and concepts that ... will help the association to grow.

2 How many artists do you expect to be included in the Art Beyond Sight exhibit, and how many types of art will be exhibited?

Art Beyond Sight was the brainchild of one of our members and another member's wife who came to the NHAA

last year and offered us the opportunity to collaborate with the N.H. Association of the Blind on this exhibition. It is a wonderful and important opportunity to raise awareness on how artists can make art more accessible to the blind, and those with low vision. This particular exhibition is an open juried show. That means we won't know how many artists will enter, how many will be chosen by the juror, or what kind of art forms we will see.

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3 What is the future of the NHAA?

The NHAA has a bright future, and opportunities are plentiful. The current economy poses a huge challenge to funding, and we are having to think out of the box. There are a lot of projects in development which I am excited about because they open more doors for the members to show their work ... as well as demonstrate to communities and visitors how great the art scene in New Hampshire is. We are also expanding our educational programming ...

4 The Levy gallery is the center of the NHAA, but are there other galleries around the state where the NHAA is involved?

The gallery is a wonderful location for the NHAA ... but it is just an extension of the organization. We annually participate in the Sunapee Fair, and also have a member juried show at the Currier Museum. Currently, I am traveling a lot around the



The Conniption Fits are, from left, Stevens Webster Blanchard, Erik Von Geldern, and Seth Roy. They just released their second CD.

Three equals two

◆ **Conniption Fits:** A collaborative effort by this Connecticut River Valley trio has resulted in their second CD, a collection of songs that presents a perspective on life and relationships.

By PAT HAMMOND
Special to the Sunday News

THE CONNIPTION FITS' second CD, "A Heaping Help of Perspective," is an omnibus of original songs by the rising stars of the Northern New England rock scene.

Appearing three years after the release of the band's first CD, "Airplane Rides," "A Heaping Help of Perspective" is a collaborative effort by all three band members. However, group founder Stevens Blanchard said he drew on his own life experiences over the past two years in writing the songs.

"If you listen to the songs in order, they tell a bit of a story," said Orford's Blanchard. "It is one of making up your mind to leave a relationship, and that is where the story starts with 'Now I Take My Leave.' Then we get into ('She Just Needs To Go) Away,' redefining the need to escape the bad relationship."

The Conniption Fits



a heaping helping of perspective

From an affair and its perils in "Get Off" to wrestling with remorse in "Willing To Try This Again," the album traces the relationship until the last song, "Time Remains," what Blanchard said is "a final song of hope for the future."

"The funny thing is that none of this was planned; it just fell into place by itself," Blanchard said. Blanchard said the band's sig-

nature upbeat sound is created by blending the members' collective experiences with an array of musical backgrounds, drawing influences from the Police, U2, and Foo Fighters.

Blanchard provides vocals, guitars and synthesizer for the album, while Erik Von Geldern provides vocals, bass, synthesizer and keyboards. Seth Roy supplies vocals, drums and percussion.

Blanchard said that since the band's inception in 2005, the Conniption Fits have performed live cross-genre audiences in venues throughout New England, including Pumpkin Fest in Keene, the Black Brimmer in Manchester and Boston's Bell in Hand.

Blanchard himself has performed more than 1,500 shows over six national tours, and has shared the stage with acts including 3 Doors Down, Fastball, The Mighty Mighty Bosstones, Seven Mary Three, Bl Oyster Cult, Mountain, Warrant, Cinderella.

Von Geldern, a graduate of Lebanon High School, and Roy have been performing for years in and out of the studio. Both have music degrees from Johnson State College in Vermont.

The Conniption Fits will play at McCue's in Keene at a K-Rock 10 supported event on Friday.

Dates of upcoming performances at the Lake Morey (Vt.) Resort, The Woodstock Inn, Derryfield Country Club in Manchester, Portsmouth Gaslight, and the Connecticut Valley Fair will be announced on the website conniptionfits.com in the coming weeks.

For information about the band or its new CD, go to conniptionfits.com, or myspace.com/theconniptionfits. Or go to iTunes, Amazon CD Baby.