

Armerding Americana's new face

MUSIC PREVIEW

JAKE ARMERDING

Club Passim, 47 Palmer St., Harvard Square, Cambridge, 8 p.m. Thursday. Tickets \$12, \$10 for members. Openers: Dromedary. For information and tickets, call (617) 492-7679.



In this 1993 photo, 15-year-old Jake Armerding played on stage with Northern Lights.

also know my dad started everything.”

It has cut both ways. The elder Armerding, interviewed Friday at a bluegrass festival in Connecticut, said that he is retiring from Northern

Lights after about 28 years. He said he's leaving partly to reduce a demanding schedule, occasionally to perform with his son and with a Vermont-based gospel group. He said another reason for leaving the band is that his son's passion and energy to discover his own musical path made him realize there are other musical outlets for him to pursue. His departure won't take place, he said, until a replacement can be found.

Meanwhile, Jake Armerding's latest project – self-mixed on his personal computer – is being well received for its catchy songs and many styles. The CD varies in mood in “The

Like many songwriters and musicians, Ipswich native Jake Armerding went to Nashville to seek fame and fortune.

It wasn't until he returned home last summer that Nashville called him.

Since its recent release on Nashville's Compass Records, Armerding's self-titled, self-produced second CD has turned him into one of the hottest properties in folk music circles and on the Americana airwaves.

The modest 25-year-old fiddler, mandolin player, guitarist and tenor singer is well known to followers of the New England-based bluegrass group Northern Lights. He is the son of one of its founders, mandolinist and singer-songwriter Taylor Armerding.

In the early 1990s, the wide-eyed younger Armerding watched with amazement and learned as fiddling great Vassar Clements jammed with his father's band. As he learned the fiddle – his father put it in his hands at 4 – Armerding emulated fiddle greats Stuart Duncan and Mark O'Connor.

Contacted by phone in Oregon, where he was performing with a Celtic group featuring Hanneke Cassel and Christopher Lewis, Armerding said he believes musicians achieve greatness by pursuing their passion and developing their own voice.

“It seems like the greatest artists out there really can't be copied,” he said. “We all learn from those who come before us.”

At 12, Armerding occasionally joined Northern Lights on stage and joined the band full time in 1992, when he was 14. His fiddle playing often was met with huge applause from appreciative fans, who were both amazed by his youth, technical skills and flair for the music. He went on to record on three CDs and played some 400 shows before quitting the group at 20. He graduated Wheaton College in Illinois in 2000.

Armerding learned much from his father, as well, and he credits him with encouraging him. “I believe I've done a lot of work to get where I am, but I



Taylor Armerding, Jake's father.



STEPHEN IDE photos/The Patriot Ledger

Jake Armerding's self-titled CD is getting significant airplay nationwide. He offers a variety of styles, from traditional to rock and country.

Ballad of Sorrow and Joy” to the hopeful (“Unsaveable”), and from traditional to country to rock to piano-blues. He sings of the mythical Odysseus in “Ithaca” and of a male-fantasy rendezvous with a woman in the snappy, countrified “Little Boy Blue (North of North Dakota).”

“The fantasy is, I think, what makes it a pretty good song,” Armerding said.

Other songs are truer to his life. “Adonai,” based on the Greek and Hebrew word for God, reveals a struggle with belief. Armerding, a Protestant, says he is religious, though

he doesn't proselytize through his music.

“I'm not as religious as I should be,” he said. “I'm constantly aware of becoming more committed and more sanctified to God.

“I try to make music and artistry the main objective . . . music is here to inspire us. It's here to move us. But not necessarily in a specific religious way.”

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–STEPHEN IDE
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