

Teacher celebrates CD release with concerts at Chick's Cafe

BY ERIC FEBER
STAFF WRITER

To his high school students he's Mr. Farley, head of the social studies department and a history teacher.

But to longtime local music fans he's Tom Farley — former member of Cimmarron, the Herndon-Edwards Band and the Tom Farley-Cam Head Band. He was a fixture at Norfolk and Virginia Beach nightclubs and restaurants in the 1970s and '80s and has two recordings of original music to his credit: "Songsmyth" and "Calm Before the Storm."

For old times sake and to celebrate the re-release of "Songsmyth" — with added live and home recorded songs — on compact disc, Farley will once again assume the role of acoustic guitarist/lead singer. He will join his wife, Tania, a keyboard player, and longtime guitarist and friend Gerry Herndon for two evenings of musical fun at Chick's Beach Cafe.

"I haven't really played anywhere for at least five years," Farley said. "So we thought we'd celebrate the release of 'Songsmyth and the Basement Tapes' with a return to the stage; make it a combination CD release party and concert. Gerry's now living in Florida, but we're flying him in especially for these two shows."

Farley, 47, said he always wanted to put his first album on long-lasting compact disc. To the original



Tom Farley's "Songsmyth" has been re-released on CD with additional cuts.

seven songs, 33 minutes-worth, of "Songsmyth," he has added nine more cuts, mainly live jams, studio out-takes and homemade recordings.

Farley, who teaches at Hickory High School in Chesapeake and who has taught at Virginia Wesleyan College for 12 years, began the recording restoration project in October 1997. He designed the cover and composed liner notes for the nine-song "Basement Tapes," which includes an instrumental version of "Over The Rainbow," along with tunes by Otis Redding, Tony Rice and Melissa Etheridge.

"I had all these tapes that were at least 16 years old and none of them have much of a shelf life," he explained. "I wanted to archive those 'Basement' songs and put 'Songsmyth' on disc at the same time.

"At first I was just going to put them onto a disc just for myself, but then I thought maybe there's fans, band friends and others who hung out with us who would like a copy. So we decided to put out a limited pressing of 500 copies. And besides, many people have never heard these songs before."

Farley, a Portsmouth native and a 1969 graduate of Bayside High in Virginia Beach, said many of his new students have never heard about his musical life.

"A lot of the kids at Hickory don't know Mr. Farley had a life before coming to the school," he said with a smile. "Some knew about the 'Calm Before the Storm' but 'Songsmyth' was put out before many were even born."

Before joining the Hickory faculty when the school opened in the fall of '96, he was a popular history, social studies and geography teacher at Indian River junior and high schools for more than 20 years combined. He said those students knew all about his other life.

A framed cover of "Songsmyth," which was released on vinyl in 1982, adorned his Indian River classrooms.

"They all knew I played in several bands and loved to perform, I made sure they did," the Virginia Beach resident said with a chuckle. "Actually, they all thought it was kind of cool their teacher performed in bars and clubs."

He called his music "high-energy acoustics," with Herndon's electric leads blending with Farley's visceral acoustic rhythm guitar work. He said he was inspired by the folk-rock of Jackson Browne, Bob Dylan, the Beatles and Dan Fogelberg.

"I don't think anyone will be disappointed," he said of the two special concerts. "We're planning on having too good of a time."

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