

Toni Brown Band to take the stage at Sellersville Theater

Former Relix publisher now busy making her own music

Karen Gross

Jerry Garcia once told Toni Brown, "Write about what you know."

From 1980 to 2000 Toni wrote countless stories as editor and publisher of Relix magazine, an eclectic music publication devoted to the Grateful Dead community, which had inspired Toni since her first Grateful Dead concert in 1969.

She sought out new talent among emerging rock and jam bands, giving groups including Phish, Dave Matthews and Blues Traveler their first media attention.

More recently, Toni has been focused on personal writing pursuits.

Since she and her husband and Relix founder, Les Kippel, sold the magazine in 2000, Toni has been focused on making music, which is often drawn from her own life experiences.

For instance, the title track from her recent album, "Rabbit Hole Soul," ties "Alice in Wonderland" references to



The Toni Brown Band features John Danaher, left, Brown, and Benj Janyszeski, right.

Toni's happiness with life beyond the publishing world.

"In 2000, it was the first time

I had to look at myself as a musician instead of looking at myself as a publisher," Toni said.

Immersed in music as a journalist, Toni started writing songs after Grateful Dead lyricist, Robert Hunter, gave her a guitar he had gotten from Garcia, the band's lead guitarist and vocalist. Hunter told her to learn to play it.

Toni began touring nationally as a performer in 1995. That year she also recorded her first

CD, "Blue Morning," produced by Hot Tuna's Michael Falzarano with the backing assistance of the David Nelson Band and Jorma Kaukonen of Hot Tuna and Jefferson Airplane.

"I got encouraged by the bands we wrote about. They'd say, 'Let's go record some of your music,'" Toni said.

Based in Brooklyn, N.Y. during the Relix years, Toni and Les often would visit Bucks County.

They bought a house in New Hope 18 years ago which still serves as a creative haven for Toni. "I do everything that's creative in Bucks County. I go into my backyard and that's inspiring. I definitely find my peace there," she said.

"The Now and Then Shop was one of the first to carry the magazine. They sold a lot of copies. We loved the area, and we kept coming every weekend," Toni recalled.

After the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, Toni and Les decided to purchase a second home in

Celebration, a Disney-built community in Orlando, Fla., as a place to raise their son, Philip.

"I thought, 'Where would he find the most happiness?' He loves Disney," Toni said.

She has since been regularly shuttling between Orlando and Bucks County, performing in both places.

Her Bucks County band features John Danaher of New Hope on guitar and Benj Janyszeski of Revere on bass.

They have performed locally at a Jerry Garcia benefit at Havana and the Showcase of the Arts in New Hope, the Tomorrow's Secrets holistic fair at Prallsville Mills in Stockton, N.J. and at the closing party for the Now and Then Shop earlier this year.

In Orlando the Toni Brown Band is the top drawing act at Hard Rock Live, a monthly event in a 3,000 seat venue. Her Florida ensemble includes former Grateful Dead keyboardist, Tom Constanten.

"The young people get so excited. Everyone wants to play with him," said Toni, who is active Jambando, Orlando's musicians cooperative.

"I love to bring musicians together. That's what Relix was about," she said.

Toni describes her original music as "ethereal folk-rock" with traces of country, blues and jam band styles. "There are improvisational influences but I'm a songwriter. There's more structure," she said.

On Saturday, Sept. 18 at the Sellersville Theater 1894, the Toni Brown Band will open for NRBQ, The New Rhythm and Blues Quartet, who have released more than 25 albums in their 35 years together.

"We had written about them at Relix. To be part of the show is exciting to me," Toni said.

Sellersville Theater is at Main and Temple streets, Sellersville.

Call 215-257-5808 or visit www.ToniBrownBand.com.

Toni Brown live in Sellersville

The Toni Brown Band will be featured 8 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 18 at the Sellersville Theater 1894. The group will perform Brown's original songs and a possible cover song or two.

The Toni Brown Band will open for NRBQ, The New Rhythm and Blues Quartet, who have released more than 25 albums in their 35 years together.

Call 215-257-5808 or visit www.ToniBrownBand.com.