

Hastings-bred musician comes home to local restaurant

By David Maggiotto

Brian Conigliaro was having dinner at Comfort in Hastings one night when he discovered that the restaurant's co-owner, Roger Caro, was a music lover. Conigliaro teaches guitar, harmonica, and bass at The Masters School in Dobbs Ferry, and had recently made a habit of visiting Comfort for dinner after work.

He gave Caro a copy of his 2005 live album, "The Economics of Love," and Caro, after listening to it, invited Conigliaro to perform for Comfort patrons. "Every once in a while you run across someone who has enough soul that they want to feature live music," Conigliaro said in a phone interview earlier this week.

For the last few weeks Conigliaro has been playing at Comfort on Thursday nights, and he will be performing again on Oct. 11, from 7 to 9 p.m. The sets feature Conigliaro on acoustic or seven-string guitar playing original jazz works along with stylized covers of popular songs, such as Bob Dylan's, "All Along the Watchtower."

Playing at Comfort is "one of those karmic things" for Conigliaro, who has fond and music-filled memories of hanging out at the venue as a teenager. Growing up in Hastings in the 1960s, Comfort's storefront at 583 Warburton Avenue was home to Sam's Cup and Saucer. "It was a classic malt shop with a great jukebox," Conigliaro said. "Everybody went there after school."

"Everybody" included Barbara McAndrews, the girl he had had his eye on since elementary school and whose father, William McAndrews, served as the Hastings village justice and as a village trustee.

Conigliaro

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

duction of "A Chorus Line" for six months, after the original guitarist left the show. He also played guitar for "Eubiel," starring Gregory Hines, and two decades later returned to Broadway to substitute for the regular guitarist for "Rent."

In the mid-1980s he and Barbara moved to California, and Conigliaro found a five-year gig singing and playing guitar on tour with The Tokens, best known for their 1961 version of "The Lion Sleeps Tonight." He and his wife also

"When I finally got up the nerve to ask out my wife, it was at the Cup and Saucer," he said. The two began dating when they were 14, and graduated Hastings High School together in 1969. Back then, Conigliaro was known as Brian Connie. His father had truncated the family name in the 1950s while he was playing lead trombone in the Gene Krupa band.

Brian Conigliaro has been going by that name professionally for the last 15 years, and baseball fans might associate it with Tony Conigliaro, the Red Sox legend who is a first cousin. When the Red Sox were in town the young Brian Connie would have an all-access pass to Yankee Stadium. Prior to a game in 1964, he was standing on the field next to Conigliaro when, as a teenage rookie, Conigliaro was paid a compliment by Mickey Mantle. "Mantle ran by and said something like, 'You're doing all right out there,' and that just meant the world to him," he said.

His father, a brass musician who played with Krupa and Roy Eldridge, among others, before giving up music to sell insurance, "put a trumpet in my hands, but he said, 'You like to sing, you should probably play guitar, like Elvis,'" said Conigliaro. He began guitar at 12, and when he was 14 found his first mentor in Hastings resident Alan Freedman. In high school Conigliaro started a rock band called The Tribe, and after graduating high school he continued his studies at the Berklee College of Music in Boston.

After two years he left to study at the Stella Adler Theater Conservatory. He and his wife stayed in Manhattan, and he made it to Broadway by way of the orchestra pit. In 1981 he joined the pro-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

duced a public-access television show, "Hurry Up and Wait," which featured Conigliaro interviewing and jamming with local musicians. They produced 35 episodes of the show, and he estimated that in the early '90s the program made its way into 250,000 homes in the Santa Monica area.

Conigliaro has worked with musicians in many genres; before he returned to New York he played harmonica for a studio session with Snoop Dogg. He couldn't tell you the name of the song he worked on. "It was a rap thing in E minor," he said.

In 1998 he and Barbara, who works in advertising, returned to Hastings



JIM MACLEAN/RIVERTOWNS ENTERPRISE

Brian Conigliaro, who for years went by the stage name "Brian Connie," performs at Comfort next Thursday, Oct. 11.

with two children, Jessica, now 24, and Ian, 21, before moving north to Mahopac. That year he produced the album "No Prescription Required," by the Hastings group Housewives on Prozac. One of the band members, Joy Rose, introduced Conigliaro to Nancy Theeman, chair of the music department at The Masters School.

Conigliaro has been an instructor at the school for nine years, teaching at the middle-school and high-school level. "I teach how to read music, theory, history of musical styles," he said. Conigliaro affiliates most with jazz and blues, noting that "the language of jazz is unique to this country." He also teaches music to

younger schoolchildren in the Riverarts after-school program in Hastings.

He contrasted growing up in an earlier era, when the only access young people had to music was the radio, a few television shows, and the record store, to the exposure to kids today. "They're deluged," he said. "There's just millions of pieces of product now." But his experience with young musicians gives him hope that the music traditions he loves will carry on. "There are still young people that are being educated culturally so that they seek the great players," said Conigliaro. "The youth do have that eye of the tiger, a certain amount of them. They seek the truth — that's the savior of the arts."