

NEWS RELEASE

The San Francisco String Trio celebrates the 50th Anniversary of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band with May I Introduce to You*, a Kaleidoscopically Creative Reimagining of the Beatles' Epochal Album

Available September 8, 2017 via Ridgeway Records

When Sgt. Pepper taught the band to play, he couldn't have foreseen the extraordinary **San Francisco String Trio**. The Bay Area super-group featuring guitarist **Mimi Fox**, bassist/vocalist **Jeff Denson**, and violinist **Mads Tolling** has found a consistently enthralling vehicle for musical exploration in the 1967 masterpiece. Slated for release on Ridgeway Records on **September 8, 2017**, ***May I Introduce to You*** is the trio's debut album and a loving homage to the classic Beatles record on its 50th anniversary.

The SF String Trio brings together three celebrated masters who have each recorded critically acclaimed albums as bandleaders. Much like the Beatles drew on an array of traditions and styles in crafting *Sgt. Pepper's*, the cooperative ensemble approaches each track as an opportunity to imbue supremely familiar songs with a sense of delight and surprise. "The idea was to do something different to shake up these fantastic songs, but not just for the sake of doing something new," says Fox. "We're all coming from a jazz background and we like to mix things up."

"We love to blend genres and you can hear tango, R&B, pop and classical influences too," Tolling adds. "We're all arrangers and we'd work on pieces individually then bring them in and work on them as a group and really make them come to life."

Though the musicians grew up in different generations (and different countries), they're united by vaunted reputations as improvisers, abiding love of the Fab Four, and faculty positions at the California Jazz Conservatory. As the senior member of the ensemble, Fox remembers the explosive impact of *Sgt. Pepper's* release as a child growing up in New York. Tolling, a classical prodigy, fell in love with the Beatles as his gateway to pop music as a teenager coming of age in Denmark in the mid-90s. And Denson heard the album in regular rotation amidst his mother's records while growing up outside Washington D.C. in the 1980s. The universally beloved album left a deep and enduring impression on each of them that has continued to provide inspiration in their work as jazz artists.

"When I first moved out here I taught a class on the Beatles at the California Jazz Conservatory," says Denson, who became the first full professor in the CJC's newly accredited Bachelor of Music program in 2011. "When I first went to Berklee, where

Mads and I met, I took an arranging class and wrote a chart for 'She's Leaving Home.' It's always been a really special album to me and part of my life."

The trio's emotional connection to *Sgt. Pepper's* is evident throughout *May I Introduce to You*, and every track sheds a bright and revealing light on the genius of the Beatles. Tolling transfuses some of Joe Cocker's gospel fervor into his ballad arrangement of "With A Little Help From My Friends," and sets a good deal of "Lucy In the Sky With Diamonds" to a crunching 5/4 beat. Fox evokes George Harrison's sitar with a sleek modal interpretation of "Within You Without You" and delivers a ravishing solo rendition of "She's Leaving Home." Denson's arrangement of "Fixing A Hole" incorporates his striking vocals, as does his multilayered unpacking of "A Day In the Life," another tour de force that distills the song's essence while winding its way to a surprising climax, with Fox's twang replacing the famous last crashing chord. "Essentially we have three drummers in the group, as we're all comfortable with our instruments' percussive qualities," Fox says, "as well as the harmonic and melodic possibilities."

It's hard to overstate the wealth of experience the trio brings to this project. An internationally acclaimed touring artist for the past quarter century, **Fox** has performed/recorded with horn heavy weights (Branford Marsalis, David Sanchez, Houston Person), fellow fret masters (Charlie Byrd, Stanley Jordan, Charlie Hunter), Hammond B-3 greats (Joey DeFrancesco, Barbara Dennerlein, Dr. Lonnie Smith), and vocal stars (Abbey Lincoln, Diana Krall, Kevin Mahogany). She's shared the stage with legends Stevie Wonder and John Sebastian and Patty Larkin featured her on the Vanguard Records project *La Guitara*. Fox has released 10 critically acclaimed albums as a leader, including three on Steve Vai's Favored Nations label. Her YouTube videos have received hundreds of thousands of views. In conjunction with Heritage's 30th anniversary, the Kalamazoo guitar company has rolled out the Mimi Fox Artist signature model.

Born and raised in Copenhagen, **Tolling** was on his way to a successful career as a classical soloist when he discovered Miles Davis. His growing passion for jazz brought him to Berklee in 2000, where at the recommendation of Jean-Luc Ponty bass luminary Stanley Clarke recruited him for his touring band. He moved to the Bay Area in 2003 to join the pioneering crossover string ensemble Turtle Island Quartet, an eight-year run that included two Grammy Awards for 2006's *4+Four*, and 2008's *A Love Supreme: The Legacy of John Coltrane* (both on Telarc). Since setting out on his own in 2012, Tolling has established himself as an ambitious bandleader, accomplished composer, and daring improviser committed to expanding the violin's sonic parameters. A Yamaha clinician who's given workshops in the US, Canada, Japan and Dubai, Tolling earned the #1 slot as Rising Star Violinist in the 2016 *DownBeat* Critic's Poll. His latest album, 2017's *Playing the 60s* (Madsman Records), mines the New Frontier era for powerfully engaging but oft-overlooked material while introducing an ardently grooving group sound.

Denson first gained international attention in the cooperative trio Minsarah with Israeli drummer Ziv Ravitz and German pianist Florian Weber. It was the group that caught the ear of alto sax legend Lee Konitz, who adopted the combo as his rhythm

section on 2007's *Deep Lee*, 2009's *Live at the Village Vanguard*, which earned the 2010 Album of the Year Award from France's Jazzman Magazine, and 2014's *Standards Live: At the Village Vanguard* (all on Enja). A prolific composer and arranger, he's written music for an array of jazz settings, from big band to trio, as well as for string ensembles, solo bass, and a chamber opera. Since settling in the Bay Area, Denson has released five solo albums in six years and continued to tour internationally with Lee Konitz and his own projects along with forging new creative alliances with some of the West Coast's most prodigious improvisers. He's explored intricate harmonic soundscapes with drummer Alan Hall and bassoon and electronics virtuoso Paul Hanson, and recorded with Konitz again, this time under his own name, on 2015's *The Jeff Denson Trio + Lee Konitz*. The album introduced Denson's Ridgeway Records label, which over the last two years has become an essential outlet for brilliant young artists and established masters in the Bay Area and beyond.

Denson first met Fox shortly after he arrived in the Bay Area and was immediately impressed by her musicality. "We started getting together and playing duo, and talking about different possibilities," Denson says. "Mads and I had met at Berklee but really got a chance to play together after I moved here and I did some things with his band. Mads and Mimi had also been talking about playing together. Finally, we connected all the dots and we had great musical chemistry right away."

Their formidable chemistry ignites on *May I Introduce to You*, a project that sets a new standard for jazz interpretation of the Beatles. Inspired by each other and an era-defining album, the San Francisco String Trio pays the ultimate compliment to the Liverpool lads by treating their songs as an extension of the Great American Songbook. "The Beatles have spanned generations," Fox says, "and their melodies, particularly Paul's ballads, hold their own with Irving Berlin and Cole Porter. Musically, emotionally and creatively, this project has everything going for it."

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