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## Raphaël Fraise spurred growth of gypsy jazz

The sweet-playing French musician and schoolteacher found a home in the Twin Cities music scene. He was 31.

**Ben Cohen**, Star Tribune

Raphaël Fraise of Hopkins, a Parisian who was a classically trained violinist, once earned spare change playing gypsy jazz in Paris Metro stations.

After Fraise moved to the Twin Cities seven years ago, he found a home where he could perform on stage.

Fraise, a French and social studies teacher, died of leukemia Sunday in Paris. He was 31.

In Minnesota, he influenced the growth of gypsy jazz, mostly as a member of the group Parisota Hot Club.

"He really made the thing go" in Minnesota, said Parisota's band leader and guitarist, Robb Henry of Minneapolis. "He was a good light, swinging violinist."

Because of Fraise's enthusiasm for the music form, three or four gypsy jazz or hot club bands call the Twin Cities home, Robb said. They play the style of European jazz begun in 1930s Paris and made famous by guitarist Django Reinhardt and violinist Stéphane Grappelli.

Fraise was a member of the Clearwater Hot Club band of Grand Rapids, Minn., in 2004. He also performed variously with the Bill Evans New Orleans Jazz Band, the Mouldy Figs and groups led by Dr. Henry Blackburn.

He also began performing and recording with jazz vocalist Connie Evingson more than two years ago.

"What a stroke of luck to have an authentic" gypsy jazz violinist in the Twin Cities, Evingson said. "He really listened and played off other players real well."

Henry recalled his friend as a gentle soul who enthusiastically boosted the jazz style in Minnesota. "His playing really reflected his personality," he said. "He had a sweet style."

One of Fraise's last performances in Minneapolis took place at Orchestra Hall with Parisota in February 2005.

Fraise, who was a teacher at the International School of Minnesota in Eden

Prairie, was also enthusiastic about his day job.

"He always had an ear and eye out for his students, and they knew the sincerity of his interest," said Sue Berg, director of the private school.

He supported students by attending and helping with extracurricular events. And he was an avid soccer player and fan who passed his European-honed playing skills on to students, Berg said.

He is survived by his parents, Henri and Anne of Paris; and brothers Renaud of Toulouse, France, and Laurent of Paris.

A musical celebration in the Twin Cities is being planned for later this month.

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