

## Young musicians making their marks

Louisiana has many gifted young musicians. Many of them perform frequently, write songs and release CDs. We've highlighted some who are among the Baton Rouge area's busiest and best-known young talents.

- By JOHN WIRT
- Music writer
- Published: Aug 13, 2010

### [Comments \(1\)](#)

#### **Clay Newsom and the Quarter Moon Band**

Walker High School student Clay Newsom performs every weekend with Clay Newsom and the Quarter Moon Band. Even during this summer's record heat, the group is drawing capacity crowds to La Carreta Mexican Restaurant's patio in Denham Springs.

"It's a neat feeling that we've got that many friends and supporters," band member Sherry Newsom said.

Clay Newsom and the Quarter Moon band recently released a self-titled CD containing such audience favorites as "Tupelo Honey," "I Got A Woman" and "Ragin', Little Cajun Love."

"Things that we've played in the last three years that the fans get up and dance to," 15-year-old singer-keyboardist Clay Newsom said.

Recording songs the band knows so well made sessions at Dockside Studio, a world-famous recording studio just outside of Lafayette, go smoothly.

"We just went in there, got it down and left," the teen pianist said.

In addition to Clay and Sherry Newsom, the Quarter Moon Band features guitarist Jeff Newsom and drummer Paul Golmon. Clay Newsom and his parents, Jeff and Sherry, all sing lead vocals, but he's definitely the band's main attraction.

"I can take the wildest guitar ride you ever heard in your life," Jeff Newsom said, "but when Clay plays and sings, which is most every song, every eye is on him. And I had to work hard to achieve my chops, but he's effortless."

Although Clay Newsom took classical piano lessons as a child, his interest in the keyboard soared after he watched the Ray Charles biopic, *Ray*. By late 2007 he was performing professional engagements with the Quarter Moon.

Newsom initially let his parents do the singing, but he's since grown confident at the microphone as well.

“Now he doesn’t want to give me a turn,” Sherry Newsom said.

“Clay’s the most confident musician I’ve ever worked with,” Jeff Newsom said.

A composer for the past three years, Clay Newsom writes songs in as little as 10 or 20 minutes. He plans to record an album of his original material later this year.

“I get the melody first and then the words just come,” he said.

Defining his musical style may be more difficult than composing the songs.

“I don’t think it’s any one style,” he said. “I have one song that’s kind of bluesy and rockish, another that’s a cross between country and pop. I have others that are just all different flavors.”

---

## **The Chris Guillot Band**

Chris Guillot, 17-year-old singer, guitarist and keyboard player with the Chris Guillot Band, visited New York City last month and sat in with the house band at The Sugar Bar.

Patronized by such celebrities as Bruce Willis, Stevie Wonder, Whoopi Goldberg, Michael Douglas and Eddie Murphy, The Sugar Bar is owned by the husband and wife songwriting-recording team of Nicholas Ashford and Valerie Simpson.

Ashford and Simpson’s friend, Roberta Flack, invited Guillot to New York after meeting him at a New Orleans club where he was playing jazz trumpet. During his Sugar Bar performance, Flack, Ashford and Simpson sang backup for the young Baton Rouge musician from their seats.

“They’re some of the coolest people I’ve ever met,” Guillot said of those famous new friends.

The classic soul and rhythm-and-blues music of Flack, Ashford and Simpson, Sam Cooke, Wonder and the Supremes are among Guillot’s major influences. As for his guitar, Jimi Hendrix is his prime inspiration. His performances include Hendrix classics “Red House” and “Bold As Love.” Guillot’s guitar prowess has also inspired comparisons to contemporary star John Mayer.

Guillot started piano at 4 and guitar at 7. On stage with the Chris Guillot Band — featuring 14-year-old bassist Chris Roberts and 16-year-old drummer Jonathan Sheets — he plays both guitar and keyboard.

Local venues where Guillot’s trio has performed include Churchill’s and Mi Padres. Despite having only three members, the group produces a surprisingly full sound. The musical and personal chemistry between himself, Sheets and Roberts, Guillot said, is so good that he expects this recently formed group to have a long lifespan.

The composer of dozens of songs, Guillot and his band are preparing their first CD. They plan to release an album of all-original music in October.

Like the band’s performances, the CD will feature a variety of styles. Writing songs since childhood, Guillot composes at both the guitar and piano, although he finds the piano’s greater harmonic possibilities more conducive to songwriting.

Having already had a taste of New York City, Guillot plans to attend the College of Staten Island following his 2011 high school graduation from Christian Life Academy. New York being a city where musicians have migrated to for generations to pursue careers in the arts, Guillot sees that cultural capital as the place for him,

too.

---

### **C.J. Solar**

A 2010 graduate of Catholic High School who'll be studying songwriting at Belmont University in Nashville this year, C.J. Solar started performing with his twin brothers Mack and Cody eight years ago. Through the years the 17-year-old singer-guitarist also made duo appearances with guitarist Stan Campbell and performed with local band the Alan Twitty Project.

Solar's band of brothers, Solar Heat, released a CD in the summer of 2008. He's following that up with his solo CD debut, *Rocks The South*. Featuring 12 of his original compositions, Solar plans to use the disc as his Nashville calling card.

"This is something that I can hand to people, to let them know what my songwriting is like," he said.

Having played many classic rock favorites with Solar Heat, the Nashville-bound singer-songwriter's current direction is definitely country.

"I guess I was going for Southern rock but Southern rock nowadays is really country," he explained.

Although Solar started writing songs four years ago he didn't get truly serious about it until two years ago.

"I realized I didn't want to play cover songs forever," he said. "The people on the radio are making their own songs, so I started writing with the intention of my songs being radio songs."

Hoping to improve his songwriting, Solar attended songwriter seminars in Nashville.

"They were a big help," he said. "A lot of it is what to talk about in a song, things people relate to. And just a bunch of little rules that you might not think about."

Solar likes the process of writing songs, but he enjoys performing them most of all.

"The writing is fun but nowhere near as fun as being at a show and saying, 'Hey, everybody, this is a song I wrote.' If they say, 'I love that song,' that's a good feeling."

Solar had long thought he'd spend his college years at LSU but his parents, Kay and Curtis Solar, encouraged him to consider Belmont University. Well-known for its music business program, Belmont is located in the nation's country music capital. He'll major in commercial songwriting there with a minor in music business.

"I realized Nashville is the place to be for being a songwriter, an artist and all kinds of things," he said.

Solar also plans to perform his original songs at the songwriter nights staged at numerous Nashville venues.

"I'm going to be there for four years, so I might as well take the most opportunities that I can."

---

### **Mark Klein and the Last Sensations**

Mark Klein, a senior at Central High School, wrote his first song at 9. He's released two of his own CDs and been featured on two CDs with the Boogie Kings, the classic south Louisiana band he first performed with at 10.

A dynamic singer, guitarist and songwriter, Klein performs with his own band, the Last Sensations. He's also

working on a new solo CD that will feature his original songs.

“I wrote a lot of songs after Hurricane Katrina,” Klein said. “That really touched me because a lot of my family is from New Orleans.”

Klein makes occasional appearances with the Boogie Kings now but lately he more often can be seen with the Last Sensations. The group features the 16-year-old Klein’s singing and lead guitar; 16-year-old bassist Jacob Breaux; 15-year-old drummer Chris Jones; and 18-year-old pianist Kelsey Frazier.

“We’ve all grown up with each other,” Klein said of the group. “It’s a great fit.”

And Mark Klein and the Last Sensations aim to please.

“We play whatever the crowd wants,” he said. “We have at least three or four sets, blues, classic rock, Top 40 hits, whatever the venue calls for.”

Yet Klein and his band still play songs they especially enjoy.

“We always go with the classics,” he said. “Even if we’re surrounded by 12-year-olds, we’re still gonna play ‘Play That Funky Music,’ because it’s one of the songs that brought the band together.”

A multi-instrumentalist, Klein plays guitar, bass, piano, drums, trumpet and mandolin. Guitar is his main instrument on stage, but sometimes he plays drums and bass as well.

“Doing the same thing every night gets kind of monotonous,” he said. “So we try to keep the band on its toes as much as possible.”

Klein plans to attend college but he doesn’t intend to study music.

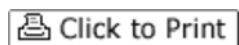
“I want to major in business so I can control my own future,” he said. “I want to be my own accountant and my own lawyer. That way I can learn both sides of the music business.”

Even so, working on the creative side of music remains Klein’s primary goal.

“It’s a great opportunity to play music for a living, to do what you want in life,” he said. “Nothing could make me any happier.”

**Find this article at:**

<http://www.2theadvocate.com/entertainment/fun/100575064.html?showAll=y&c=y>



[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

Copyright © 1992-2008, 2theadvocate.com, WBRZ, Louisiana Broadcasting LLC and The Advocate, Capital City Press LLC, All Rights Reserved.