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Jack Gaffney, 12-year-old multi-instrumentalist celebrating 'Nothing to Be Afraid Of' album release

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If you go:

What "Nothing to Be Afraid Of" Album Release Party

When 10 p.m. tomorrow night

Where: The Brick House, 1346 Pearl St

Tickets: Free, minors must be accompanied by adults

Info: jackgaffneymusic.com, myspace.com/jackgaffneymusic

With the tips he earns during performances, Jack Gaffney hopes to buy a drum set. He already plays the piano, cello, and guitar, takes music theory classes, and voice, classical piano, and composing lessons. He's even set to release his first album, with five original songs, this weekend at The Brick House on Pearl Street.

At only 12 years old, Jack already has big plans.

"It's a lot of work, but it's worth it," said Jack, a sixth-grader at Centennial Middle School.

Jack started playing piano at 4 years old, started vocal lessons at 9, and was writing his own songs by the time he was 10. Debbie Gaffney, Jack's mom, said Jack started writing songs as a way of dealing with the stress when his sister, Michelle, was having health issues and was in and out of the hospital for a few months.

"We were really surprised how good they were," Gaffney said.

Over the past 2 years, she said Jack has been performing all along the Front Range. He started showing up to open mics and now, Gaffney said Jack is beginning to be asked back to venues where he has played his music. For his performances, she said he has almost two hours worth of material--half original music, and the other half rock n' roll covers of his favorite bands. Jack said his idols are Coldplay, Elton John, The Beatles, Stevie Wonder and Billy Joel.

While Debbie Gaffney said many people think of her son as a "pint-sized Billy Joel," ever since seeing U2 in concert as a second grader, Jack said Bono has been his main role model.

"He's a really good guy," Jack said. "He's not into drugs, and he's really smart, nice, and a great musician."

A year and a half ago, Jack started working with CU faculty member and composer Carter Pann. Pann, a Grammy-nominated composer, said he first met Jack when his parents were shopping around for someone to help with Jack's songwriting. Initially, Pann was only going to help Jack find a teacher, but once he got to know Jack, he ended

up deciding to take him on as a private student.

"He's just full of raw talent," Pann said, "full of it."

With Pann's help, Jack set out to make his first album, "Nothing to Be Afraid Of," at Backbone Studio in Loveland. Jack wrote all five songs on the album himself and even plays piano and sings on all of them. He and Pann also assembled a band for the album that is made up of students and graduates of CU's College of Music and employed a 4-string quartet to play on some of the tracks.

"I'm really proud of it actually," Pann said. "It just sounds awesome."

Over winter break, Jack's sister Angie, a film student at DePaul University, helped him create his first music video for "Nothing to Be Afraid Of" as a Christmas present. They were able to set up and produce the video in four days.

Pann said he is excited and hopeful for success as Jack continues to grow and evolve as a musician.

"Once he gets older and his talent is coupled with a more mature human being he's going to be so far ahead of the curve," Pann said.

But for now, Jack said he is simply excited to be able to take advantage of all the opportunities he has at such a young age. Even though he has to struggle to balance his music and schoolwork, Jack said he thinks all his hard work is eventually going to pay off.

"I'm really busy especially since there's more homework in middle school," he said, "so that stresses me sometimes."

But despite taking on a heavy load as a sixth grader, Jack said he is still a normal kid too. Jack's favorite sport is baseball--he plays center field--and he said has an obsession with Guitar Hero. Jack also got a group of fellow sixth graders together to form a band that will be competing in the upcoming battle of the bands at Centennial.

Henry Sutter, 12, who plays drums in the band, said he has a lot of fun playing with Jack and loves his musical style.

"I have to say, Jack is probably one of the most talented musicians I've ever met," said Sutter, 12.

With the release of his first album approaching, Jack said he is excited to start playing more shows. He is also planning on releasing another album later this year, and is working on a 30-instrument symphony that he hopes will be recorded by CU's College of Music. Thanks to his many classes, Gaffney said her son is able to use professional composing software and understands musical theory and all the different instruments.

Once he finally earns enough money for a drum set, Jack said plans to add drum lessons to his growing list of music classes.

"At first, this was just a hobby," Jack said, "but I've realized that music is something I want to do for my whole life."

Caption:

Jack Gaffney, center, is saving up tips from performances to buy drums.

Jack Gaffney, left, Matt Shugert on bass, and Henry Sutter on drums.

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