

THE ROAD TO STARDOM

Young Musicians Begin Their Journey in Cy-Fair

Written by Marlena Solomon



Kaitlyn and Clay performed together at Main Street Crossings in January



Photo by Marlana Solomon

Both Clay and Kaitlyn sing, play an instrument, and write original songs



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Clay, 14, enjoys listening to John Mayer and Dave Matthews

Kaitlyn Knippers and Clay Melton seem to be typical Cy-Fair kids. Kaitlyn is 12 and a seventh grade student at Spillane Middle School. The door to her bedroom is covered in posters and her favorite singers include Taylor Swift, Carrie Underwood and Elvis Presley. She's active in Girl Scouts and takes piano lessons. Fourteen-year-old Clay is an eighth grade student at Goodson Middle School and is a member of the track team where he competes in the high jump and hurdles. He likes listening to the music of John Mayer and Dave Matthews and hanging out with his friends. But that's where their similarities with other kids their ages end and where their talent shines through.

Starting at a Young Age

Kaitlyn began singing when she was 2 years old and started vocal lessons and performing at the tender age of 7. The first songs she performed at All About Music & Arts in Houston were "Daddy's Hands" and "Castle on a Cloud" from the musical Les Miserables. By the age of 11 she recorded an original song entitled "I'll Love You," and submitted it to the Oprah's Search for the World's Smartest and Most Talented Kids contest. Kaitlyn continues to write and record new original songs and is getting ready to record "Just Me," a song she describes as upbeat, at Sugarhill Recording Studios in Houston. Clay started playing the electric guitar when he was 11 and says he's inspired by Jimi Hendrix. Other artists he emulates in his music are Stevie Ray Vaughn, Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters and Freddy King. "There's so much more depth to classic artists," says Clay, and he adds, "I want to bring blues back into the mainstream. I find the style interesting, and it fits me." Since breaking into the local music scene last year, he has formed a band that includes drummer Chip Greenman and bass player Wes Arvin.



Photo by Suzanne's Portriats

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In addition to playing the guitar, Kaitlyn also takes piano lessons

Family Matters

The road to success doesn't come without personal and family sacrifice. Kaitlyn's mom Denise says that in the five years since Kaitlyn began performing, her schedule has escalated the rest of the family's involvement to "all the time." Kaitlyn has three brothers who are regulars at her shows. "Her music career has completely affected our family," says Denise. "It's a team effort, and most of all it's about having fun," she adds. Performing also cuts in to time spent with friends at sleepovers or birthday parties, so Denise makes an effort to invite Kaitlyn's friends when she is performing. Clay's father Jack agrees that having a good team of people and a supportive family is key to his son's success. In addition to his regular job, Jack spends at least 20 hours a week on Clay's music, usually early in the morning and late at night. "Sure it's time consuming," he says, "But we're pacing ourselves. We understand how competitive the music business is, and we have weekly reality checks to keep us grounded."

The Future Looks Bright

Kaitlyn hopes to put her own band together in the future and has a busy schedule to look forward to with appearances at the Austin Rodeo, Tomball German Festival, Pasadena Strawberry Festival, The Houston Premium Outlets and a return to Main Street Crossings in Tomball where she performed for the first time with Clay and his band in January. As she continues to write music and record, she hopes to get air play on Radio Disney, is currently an on-air personality on the Christian radio station 88.3, and hopes to audition for American Idol when she turns 16. Clay looks to expand his appearances to Austin and New Orleans with dates scheduled at Main Street Crossings, The Continental Club in Houston, and Almost Austin in Pasadena. Clay's future goals include increasing his fan base and recording a demo while continuing to tour and write original songs. Don't be surprised, Cy-Fair, when one day you hear Kaitlyn and Clay on the radio. With their amazing talent and supportive families, these two young musicians are well on their way on the road to success. **CFM**

MARLENA SOLOMON considers herself an amateur vocalist at best, currently singing with the praise band and choir at her church. Her one claim to fame is she sang The National Anthem and God Bless America at PNC Park for the Pittsburgh Pirates.

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