

Holcombe teen records full-length original album



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HOLCOMBE — When Sage Leary was 10 years old, he asked if he could play his dad's old guitar.

For a year, he would pick at the strings of that old guitar until he heard a sound he liked.

"He would just get up and play it; I loved it," said Sage's father, Mark Leary. "There was no hesitation or thought of what it should sound like — there was no fear at all."

For his 11th birthday, Sage received a gift of guitar lessons from his aunt, who drove him 120 miles each week from his home in Holcombe to Morgan Music in Eau Claire. Mark voiced some concern about formal training disrupting his son's knack for kicking out a great sound off the cuff.

"We thought the lessons might get in the way," he said. "They didn't."

Sage fine-tuned his skills and eventually found his niche with jazz and blues.

By age 14, Leary recorded his debut album of original work that was released in September.

The instrumental album, "Feel the Sound" is diverse, pinging off the sounds of blues, rock, boogie, Latin, funk and bluegrass and mixing it with finger-picking Piedmont blues.

"I feel like the blues helps me express myself through that music," said Sage, who is now 15. Mark backed him up by adding that rock-and-roll beats are too defined and leave little room for creativity.

Sage practiced 50 hours a week, on top of his coursework for his online classes, all while working with professional musicians and University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire music students to develop and structure his sound.

It took Sage about five months to develop the songs, and he spent the month of May recording them.

The album was recorded and mixed by Evan Middlesworth at Pine Hollow Audio in Eau Claire, was mastered at Hanzsek A/V in Seattle, Washington, and was produced by Mark.

In addition to Sage on guitar, Middlesworth and Jordan Jenkins are featured in the album on bass. On percussion is one of Sage's instructors, Mike Malone.

"It was quite a learning experience for all of us," said Mary Leary, Sage's mother.

Mark said that while the family already spends a lot of time together, they were confronted with a new level of focus while working towards producing the album.

"We really wanted this to be representative of what Sage can do," Mark said.

Sage was initially skeptical of advertising his young age, wanting listeners to only consider his music for its professional sound. He's since realized that disclosing his age has become a valuable marketing tool.

Sage finds influences in Jimmy Page, Jimi Hendrix and Carlos Santana. He maintains that although some of his favorite artists aren't college graduates, he still plans to attend in addition to continuing his career as a musician.

The entirely-instrumental album was inspired by objects in nature, from the moon and sunsets to more melancholy feelings like nostalgia that Sage is conveying in the song, "Thursday Morning."

"(It's) about wishing you could go back in time and change something, but you can't so you have to move on," he said.

Sage said the purpose of his music is to remind listeners of the things they enjoy about life.

"I seek to put positive emotion into my songs," he said. "I want to make the world a better place through music."

Get the album

Sage Leary: Feel the Sound

Sage Leary's album is available on his website, sageleary.com, and through Morgan Music, Volume One and Toad House.

It's available for digital download at CD Baby, iTunes, Amazon, Spotify and Rhapsody, among others.