

Constructing Success: Canton band signs on Indie label

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If Jesse Young could have anything he wanted, he'd ask for the ability to write lyrics like John Popper and play guitar like Dave Matthews.

The Canton resident may not be a Blues Traveler, but as a singer-songwriter for the five-piece band Under Construction he seems to be doing fine on his own terms. Young, along with Canton cohorts Adam Kasten (Latin drums), Eric Schuetzler (drums), Chad Stidham (guitar) and Ryan Ruiz (bass) formed the band in 1998 while still attending high school. Without skipping a beat, Under Construction signed with the independent label Statue Records in Santa Monica, Calif., in April.

When the band got its first gig, a variety show at Plymouth-Stetson High School, the guys weren't quite ready to present themselves to an audience. In fact, they had spent all their time writing and rehearsing music and hadn't yet decided on a name. When asked what the name of the band was, the old Jesse Young replied "Just tell them the name's under construction." That statement sealed the band's fate; the name stuck.

As if moving fast-forward, Under Construction recorded a disc of six songs, titled "Dream Vision" within one month of com-

ing together as a band. "Some of those songs are still around," said Young. Another demo followed.

The band sent its music to Talbot 2000, a company that shopped Under Construction around to various record labels. As a result, the band was hired to play in a showcase for emerging musicians in New York City. Not long after the show, Statue Records expressed interest in signing them.

Though it has only been two short years, Young said it took a lot of patience on the band's part. "A lot of us expected everything to happen right away."

David Sutherland, a Saline resident and fan, recalled seeing Under Construction perform at the former Library Pub in Westland about a year ago. He was most impressed by the band's talent.

"A lot of groups you hear, they don't sound that good," he said. "Under Construction is really polished and consistent."

Sutherland is anxiously awaiting the release of the debut album on Statue Records. "They're much different than your typical band."

Young compares Under Construction's style to Florida's alterna-pop sensation Matchbox 20. He names Dave Matthews Band as a major influence. But the band is not limited to modern rock genre. On its indie



Latin drums: (left to right) Eric Schuetzler and Adam Kasten pound away as Under Construction's drum section

debut, titled "Short Street," Young said listeners might detect New Orleans-flavored jazz.

The album was named for a street in East Lansing. Since three of the members are currently attending Michigan State University, several of the band's gigs have been college parties. Under Construction's first real gig was performed at a house party on Short Street, in some ways a place where the band got its start.

Young picked up the guitar his freshman year of high school, but didn't become serious about the

instrument until the band came together. Stidham also plays guitar and sings.

Schuetzler, Kasten and Young all played percussion in their high school marching band. But Stidham focused more football than music. He picked up the guitar just a few years ago and taught himself how to play. "He amazes me, how he figures out songs," said Young.

In the beginning, Under Construction was a band without a bassist. Two weeks after the band nabbed its record deal, that changed. Enter Ryan Ruiz, Eric's roommate at Michigan State. He

switched from guitar to bass and filled in the band's sound. "Ryan impresses me," said Young. "He's not been playing bass for long. He's so good."

One month later, Under Construction headed to Hollywood to spend some long days in the studio. Ten tracks and one hidden song later, Young and the boys are anxiously awaiting the release of "Short Street," the tangible result of their musical collaboration.

The trip wasn't all the band dreamt it would be. Their studio time was cut in half, due to sharing the studio with other performers. And the band was asked to cut its CD down to only 10 tracks.

Young's favorite track is "Cover Story." It conveys pieces of certain moments in his life and has no complete, or overall meaning. "When we play it really gets me going," he said. "It's about a bunch of things, whatever comes to my mind. It's not necessarily about any one thing."

"Chad and I write the lyrics for all the songs," said Young, admitting it's one of the most difficult aspects of his work. "We all write the music. I listen to as much music as I can, from Limp Bizkit to Fuel — that's different from the type of music we play — to Johnny Cash and John Prine, Ani DiFranco. I can draw from all those different styles."

Young named Garth Brooks,



Jesse Young

Godsmack and Days of the New as other favorites in popular music. "I listen to everything," he said.

Under Construction fans are bound to recognize at least one track on the soon-to-be released CD. "She's the One" may have been the first song the band wrote, but it remains the most requested at Under Construction shows, said Young. "As a band, it's just so technically simple," he said. "As a band, we're just sort of past that." It appears on the disc regardless, to appease those fans who've been with the band since its start. Look for "Short Street" around Nov. 6. Check out the band's Web site at <http://listen.to/underconstruction> or e-mail them at u-construction@yahoo.com.

Check out local boys Under Construction Saturday, Oct. 23 at Espresso Royale Coffe, 322 S. State Street, Ann Arbor.

Teaching music hard work, but bass player enjoys it

BACKSTAGE PASS



ANN DELISI

What is the best time of day to call a musician? I usually figure it's a mistake to dial them up before 11 a.m. After all, they work nights. Then you realize that most musicians are plenty busy during the day. They have jobs outside the music business. They practice. They teach.

That's why there was no surprise that Rich Kowalewski was busy when BACKSTAGE PASS called the accomplished bass player about an upcoming performance on Detroit Public TV's weekly arts series.

"I'm sorry, I'm in the middle of a class. Could you call back after 4 o'clock?"

Those that can do, teach. It occurs to me that many of the greatest musicians of our time, such as Wynton Marsalis, have a passion for passing along what they've learned to young musicians. Kowalewski's credits include work with legends like Marsalis and Billy Eckstine, along with local standouts such as Larry Nixero and Sheila Landis. His frequent collaborations with guitarist Robert Tye have produced dynamic sounds for over two decades.

Given his impressive background, one might think that teaching would take a back seat to Kowalewski's next recording project or performance. It's clear, however, that his commitment to education is deep. In addition to serving as the instructor of a bass master class at Oakland University, he has his own studio and system of string bass and six-string bass guitar instruction. A book and accompanying CD are also being prepared to enhance the development of acoustic and electric players.

"I have always been eager to talk about music when anybody approaches me. Teaching is hard work, but I love the experience of working with a young student who is as enthusiastic about music as I am," said Kowalewski.

There's another benefit for the musician whose work encompasses contemporary jazz, Latin, classical and other styles.

"I make a point of finding out what my students are listening to and, though there are times that I don't particularly care for the sounds, it's a good way to keep my music fresh."

Kowalewski's current focus is an acoustic Brazilian sound, which is featured on a recently-released CD and in a BACK-

STAGE PASS performance to air on Detroit Public TV 7:30 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 24.

"Brazilian styles were popularized about 25-30 years ago by Stan Getz and seem to have a resurgence about every 10 years. Pop music artists like David Byrne and Sting have embraced the sound, and it's proven to be an excellent improvisational vehicle for jazz musicians."

What's the best time of the day

to call a musician? When you're calling a real pro as eager as Rich Kowalewski, any time is probably as good as any other. They never stop teaching or learning.

Rich Kowalewski performs Nov. 10 at the opening event of world-renowned glass artist Jim Kahle's exhibit at Pangborn Design Gallery. For information about the Detroit Public TV benefit, call (313) 259-3400.

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