

MUSIC

Soul queen's guitarist son blazes his own musical path

BY TAMARA WARREN
SPECIAL WRITER

Teddy Richards has performed for prime time television viewers, but his heart lies in his brand of rock 'n' roll that he cranks out at a weekly gig near his Royal Oak home.

As guitarist for his mother, Aretha Franklin, Richards balances a rigorous performance schedule for the "queen of soul" with his own band's hectic list of tour dates and recording sessions.

"Everyone assumes I was so well-connected to the industry," Richards says. "It's a much easier connection now because I have something to offer and I'm in the mix now."

Richards was raised by his stepmother and his father, Franklin's former manager and co-writer, who continues to handle the publishing arm of licensing her music.

"My mom's musical, but I grew up with my father. My home was very normal, contrary to most people's assumptions."

The 1981 Oak Park High School graduate taught himself to play guitar and launched his musical career as a student at Michigan State University in a cover band called the Prepps.

"What I wanted to do was make my own artistic statement," Richards says. "There's some smiting and structuring, similar to if you're writing a paper."

After finishing college, Richards worked in the court system before he found his way into the songwriting business.

"What has inspired me to take it on wholeheartedly is the love of the song," he says. "He pursued his passion for the alternative rock he discovered in East Lansing,

rejecting the notion that he was supposed to follow his famous mother's footsteps.

"She is an R&B legend. She doesn't hang around kids and rock people."

Richards has built his name on diligence, using a grassroots approach to networking.

"Again being painfully independent, I had never spoken to her about anything I wanted to do with my life," he says. "I've never been one to confer with her or my father."

Richards put together a six-song demo and found his production break in a chance meeting with Andrew Farris, songwriter for the popular '90s band INXS, at a Grand Valley State University show. Richards handed Farris a tape after the show.

"He called a week and a half later and wanted to know if I was interested in writing with him. It took me to be England. I was standing on the merit of my songwriting," Richards says. "His first album, *Sonic Bloom*, grew out of the partnership. Richards opened for INXS on their last American tour."

Richards has continued to carry his songwriting to another level, but he has also mastered the guitar parts for his mother's music. He has played dates with Franklin since 1984 when a position opened up for a lead guitarist.

"I started out being a rock guitar player on the Aretha Franklin concert," Richards says. "What I'm playing now is way more tasteful. I was good. I was good and I didn't realize how good."

Franklin's concerts have taken Richards to the world's coveted venues, but he has stayed true to his rocker goals.

"There's always someone out there who is interested in imposing their view over you. You have to be very solid over what you're doing. You can't let anyone else refocus it and that includes your parents."

With a steady list of engagements at Border's Books and Music stores across the country, and a weekly acoustic gig at Royal Oak's Good Night Gracie, Richards is realizing his dream, one step at a time. His second album, "Chelsea Sketches" is due out this summer on his label Farrah Music, with Universal Music handling the publishing. He recorded it at Live Wire Music in Farmington and in a

New York studio. Recently, his band has appeared on the Food Network's *Food Nation* program and a spot on the *Bryant Gumbel Morning Show*.

"That was great. I was glad to be included. It also brought together children of famous parentage who are holding it together on their own."

Richards' Upcoming Local Dates:
■ Good Night Gracies 222 S. Sherman, Royal Oak — every Tuesday evening.
(248) 684-7400.
■ Whitney Garden Party 4421 Woodward Ave. Detroit, June 20.
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Teddy Richards

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AUDIO REVIEWS

Good Morning Aztlan (Mammoth, \$18.99) — Los Lobos

Los Lobos, the exquisite Latin rock and soul outfit from East Los Angeles, celebrates its 25th year of existence in 2002. It's fitting that the band would mark this milestone with yet another fine release, *Good Morning Aztlan*.

Its first three tracks are perfect examples of the group's foundations: rock, soul and traditional Mexican music. This band of former high school pals is as tight and electrifying as ever. The album opens with a raucous blues rocker, *Done Gone Blue*, with some fiery guitar work by frontman David Hidalgo.

Done Gone Blue is followed by the soulful *Hearts of Stone*, featuring more passionate guitar work, and then *Luz de Mi Vida*, a song that cozily straddles two cultures in the same way the band has done for a quarter of a century.

The members of Los Lobos have participated in several outstanding and successful side projects, such as Latin Playboys, Hounddog and Los Super 7. Despite these creative diversions, Los Lobos has remained unshakable. Their ability to weave in and out of North American musical genres with finesse makes *Good Morning Aztlan* a wonderful silver anniversary event.

— Jim Collins, AP Writer

Joia: Chill Out Miami (George V Records, \$18.98) — Various

Artists

Joia: Chill Out Miami can best be described as ambient after-party music, a free-flowing experiment of liquid sounds and other natural acoustics mixed with syrupy techno beats. The label calls Joia, and previous releases including the popular *Buddha Bar* collection, "lifestyle" music — pleasant, rhythmic background fodder that's just right for relaxing.

The tracks are too light and ethereal to be considered downtempo, a mainstay of hipster bars coast to coast. But catchy Latin influences on Carlos Campes and Ben From Paris' title track contain enough percussion to keep things lively.

Woodwinds, chime tones and light tambourine shakes lace Ricardo Eberspacher's track *Maria*, a lilting but rhythmic song.

Other tracks are a bit more experimental, such as the staccato sounds on Wicked Lester's *Chocolate*. A scratchy voice begins the track, speaking sensually over light guitar strums before giving way to an echo chant refrain.

The album was produced by Campes and David Vixian, though they give credit to Ann Smitheo — a fake name used by Hollywood directors who refuse to take credit in a film — as a joke.

Want partygoers to ask you what CD is on in the background? Play "Joia."

— Ron Harris, AP Writer

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