

Strumming heartstrings

Music: Steven Gudino, 11, takes his natural guitar-playing abilities to new heights

By Alicia Dukov For The Signal

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Strumming his way to a path of dreams, Plum Canyon Elementary School student Steven Gudino, 11, knows a thing or two about playing music with soul.

The sixth-grader began teaching himself to play the guitar at the age of 5, quickly showing aptitude for the instrument.

Starting formal lessons two years ago with music teacher Sam Lustig of Rockstar Academy in Valencia, Gudino has taken his natural ability to all new heights.

From a talent that sprung out of inspiration from the legendary musical group The Beatles, Gudino has developed a repertoire of his own melodies and wants to share them with the world.

"I remember hearing my parents listening to The Beatles one day and that's when I wanted to learn to play," Gudino said. "I just had to try. I didn't know I could do it, but I would never know if I didn't at least try. Then it just came to me."

Gudino began strumming away to find his favorite chords and rhythms.

The gift of an acoustic guitar from his parents enhanced Gudino's ability to play around with strings, but heartstrings were also being played at the same time.

"I decided to learn my mom's favorite song on the acoustic guitar and I sang it to her on Christmas morning," Gudino said. "It makes me feel good when I can make other people happy through what I play."

But Gudino knew he didn't want to stop at learning well-known ballads and it was only a matter of time before he began to compose his own.

"I've written nine songs so far," Gudino said. "Each one is about love and I am inspired to write more everyday."

To hone in his skills, Gudino let his music teacher guide the way to the stage.

"Fundamentally, music is an outlet for self-expression and to let ourselves be creative," Sam Lustig said.

Lustig sees Gudino's talents continue to grow at the Rockstar Academy, a musical program for young musicians ages 9 and above.

The academy gives students the opportunity to enhance their musical talents through attending six classes and rehearsals.

Students learn three songs of their choice and are given a recording session in a professional studio where they can make a demo CD.

Academy students also form their own bands within the program and engage in a series of live concert performances as well as individual showcases.

"It's important to give young musicians a chance to meet others their age with similar interests," Lustig said. "The experience of working together can inspire their creativity and get them more comfortable performing in front of others. Steven definitely has a great way about him that grows and develops more every day."

Gudino's budding talents can be seen when the Academy takes the stage during monthly concert showcases at Vincenzo's Pizza in Newhall.

Gudino's mother, Connie, knows that the gift of music is one that shouldn't be kept quiet.

"I take everything as a blessing," Connie Gudino said. "His father and I always wanted him to learn an instrument but we continue to be amazed at where he's taken his gift. We are blessed every day just watching him and supporting him as he fulfills his dreams."

Gudino plans to make recordings of the songs he has written with the production company his family created to get his music out in the airwaves.

"Following your dreams is important because you never know what you can do until you do it," Gudino said. "When I just let myself do it, that's when the music comes to me."