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Jeordie blazes her own trail despite famous musical mom

By Chris Hansen Orf
Get Out

When people say they've grown up in a "musical family," it usually means their dad messed around with the guitar a little bit, or maybe that their mom sang and played piano once in a while.

For Valley singer/songwriter Jeordie, growing up in a musically family means that her grandmother, Pauline Safka, was a noted jazz singer in New York and her mother, Melanie, is a folk-music icon who had Top Ten hits in the early '70s with "Lay Down (Candles in the Rain)" and the No. 1 smash "Brand New Key," which was produced by Jeordie's father, Peter Schekeryk.

It meant, from a young age, Jeordie was able to see up close the power of music on listeners.

"After every (Melanie) show, the people would line up just to say how much her music meant to them, and I would listen and know that she did something special," Jeordie remembers of her childhood. "And (Melanie fans) would tell my sister and I all these wonderful things about my mom's music. That was, and still is, great."

The impression has been a lasting one.

"To this day, anybody who comes to see my shows — we're friends," Jeordie says of her own sets. "My audience and I, we're family."

Born Jeordonna Schekeryk 30 years ago, Jeordie made her stage debut at age 5 singing with her mother — she'll still sings harmonies on some of her mom's tours and often opens the shows with her brother Beau Jarred accompanying her on guitar. By the time she was 11 she was doing her own thing, getting help from Melanie with her budding songwriting talents.

"She's a hard-ass," Jeordie says, laughing. "She's still like, 'What was that line?' If she doesn't like something, she'll tell you."

Jeordie grew up primarily in New Jersey and Florida, has lived in California, and now her family — her mother, brother and sister, solo artist Leila — have all moved to Nashville.

Jeordie chose the West.

"I'd never been to Arizona, and I always thought I'd like it," she says of her move to the desert six years ago. "And I love it here — the colors — it's unique and very inspiring."

MUSICAL PARTNERSHIP

Initially performing in Valley clubs as a solo artist, Jeordie met her guitarist, Jason Messer, a few years ago when, not enthused about changing her own

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guitar strings ("I can change them, but it takes so long"), she showed up, guitar in hand, at Guitar Center in Tempe where Messer, a recent transplant from Cincinnati, was behind the counter.

"She comes to me and she asks me to change her guitar strings," Messer recalls of the fateful meeting. "Guitar Center always said, 'We don't do guitar strings, but if you (employees) want to do it on your own time, that's fine,' and she looked like she needed help, so she came back two hours later and I changed her guitar strings.

"Then we went into an acoustic room and she played me two songs, and I picked up a guitar and played some stuff that was floating around in my head while she played," Messer says. "Then Jeordie says, 'Why don't you come play my gig tonight?' I wasn't doing anything, so I showed up, and we played, like, four hours — I improv-ed the whole night."

"It was awesome," Jeordie remembers. "It felt so natural — it just worked. It's so nice to have a partner who knows what they're doing on the songs."

"I know there are a hundred guitarists in town who are better than me," the humble Messer says. "But I consider myself the luckiest, working with Jeordie."

FOLK THAT ROCKS

Despite playing rock and folk clubs as an acoustic duo, Jeordie and Messer command the stage better than most bands with a full lineup. Jeordie's terrific contemporary folk-pop-rock songwriting, reminiscent of Tom Petty and The Byrds and mixed with a little country and blues, gives Messer a large canvas on which to paint his tasty guitar hooks, and Jeordie's booming voice and bundle-of-energy stage presence shatters the perception that an acoustic duo can't rock.

In fact, as proof that Jeordie and Messer can rock, the duo won a battle of the bands at the Hard Rock Cafe in Phoenix in July with a crowd-pleasing set, beating out other groups equipped with Marshall amps and huge drum sets. It might be the only time an artist has ever won a battle of the bands without a band.

"There were groups with, like, five guitars and dancers in the background, so when it was our turn I said, 'This is the folk portion of the show,' " Jeordie laughs.

"And it was just awesome. Dee Snider (from '80s glam-metal band Twisted Sister) was one of the judges, and he was smiling the whole time — he was way into it."

FUTURE PLANS

Coming off their victory, Jeordie and Messer will be busy in the coming months as Jeordie plans to release a CD of live recordings in December, and they will play the movie premiere for the short thriller "Say Goodnight" — which contains tunes from Jeordie's first CD, "Can I Ask You Something" — and will be shown at the Phoenix Film Festival in March.

The duo is also scheduled to record "White Christmas" for a holiday disc, "Sound Vision Studio Christmas," and have just begun a Sunday night residency at Scottsdale club e4.

Jeordie is also organizing a "songwriters in the round" show three times a year for local singer/songwriters, the first of which will be on Oct. 6 at Last Exit Bar & Grill in Tempe.

As Jeordie's stature continues to rapidly grow in the East Valley music scene, the big question is, does Messer still change her guitar strings? She laughs: "Anytime I can let him."

Jeordie
When: 7 p.m. Friday

Where: Mickey's Hangover
4312 N. Brown Ave., Scottsdale
How much: Free
Info: (480) 425-0111

When: 10 p.m. Friday
Where: Monroe's
3 W. Monroe St., Phoenix
How much: \$5
Info: (602) 258-1046



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