



» BEHIND THE MUSIC

Although they have strikingly different sounds—from a teenager with powerful pipes to a red-hot blues trio—the following local residents are all hitting the right notes.

BY CHELSEA GREENWOOD



THE DIVA IN TRAINING

Melanie Sierra

"I always knew I wanted to pursue singing professionally."



key notes

[] Favorite composers:

George Gershwin, Irving Berlin, Stephen Sondheim, Rogers and Hammerstein, Leonard Bernstein

[] Major influences:

Celine Dion, Whitney Houston, Judy Garland, Bernadette Peters, Barbra Streisand, Michael Jackson

As Melanie Sierra turns 16 this April, she's blessed with a certainty that few of her peers possess: She knows what she wants to do with her life—in fact, she's known since a very early age.

"I always knew that I wanted to pursue singing professionally," says the Delray Beach resident. "Even when I was 3 years old, I knew."

Since then, Sierra has proven that she not only has the chops but the ambition to make her dream a reality. Locally, she has performed, seemingly, everywhere. Sierra has taken the stage at Fort Lauderdale Children's Theatre, Mizner Park Amphitheater, the Chris Evert Pro Celebrity Tennis Classic, The Breakers, Mar-a-Lago—even Dolphin Stadium.

She also has made her share of waves beyond the Sunshine State.

At age 10, she performed on the National Public Radio show "From the Top," and was even invited back to the show in 2009 to

perform alongside Pulitzer Prize-winning composer William Bolcom. She counts the latter as one of her career highlights, as well as her performance at Lincoln Center and participating in the Broadway Theatre Project summer program. Yes, Sierra is a budding actress, too, and hopes to someday showcase her talents in musical theater on Broadway.


For now, the sophomore at Dreyfoos School of the Arts is thinking about college—she currently has her sights set on Carnegie Mellon in Pittsburgh—and has the guidance of older sister Nadine, a successful opera singer. Though both are reaching for the brass ring as singers, Melanie says there has never been any jealous blood between the sisters.

"We are definitely supportive of one another," she says. "It's never really competitive at all. Nadine helps me a lot with singing and acting choices and always has great words of wisdom and advice."



THE BLUES BROTHER

JP Soars of JP and The Red Hots



"I can feel
the blues
in my soul.
It moves me."

JP Soars



Don Gottlieb



Chris Peet

Those who were there claim that JP and The Red Hots clinched the International Blues Challenge in that moment: Front man and guitarist JP Soars went into his solo during the Muddy Waters cover “The Gypsy Woman.” As his gravelly voice dropped down to barely a whisper, the crowd in the Orpheum Theater in Memphis was enthralled.

“I brought it down so low and so quiet that, at one point, you could hear a pin drop—and everybody told me that was one of the things that won it,” says the Boca Raton resident.

The trio was overwhelmed with the victory, he says, especially since they got together just to enter the regional leg of the championship in 2008.

Anybody who knew about Soars’ musical background would be equally astonished: Born and reared in Arkansas, Soars moved to South Florida in 1985 and became immersed in the thriving area metal scene, playing in such bands as Raped Ape (later Paingod), Malevolent Creation, Divine Empire and Burner.

But it was a chance win in a music store sweepstakes that earned him front row tickets to a B.B. King concert in 1988—and he was intrigued.

“I caught the blues bug,” Soars says. “That was the first little inkling of it.”

Further fueled by the early blues of Muddy Waters and the gypsy jazz of Django Reinhardt, Soars began playing with blues musicians in the area, often as a backup artist. In time, he was hooked.

“I could feel it in my soul, something about it just touched me,” he says. “It moves me.”

Since winning the IBC, Soars has been focusing on the blues full time, although he plays the occasional gypsy jazz set. When we spoke, he was working on an album featuring the Red Hots—drummer Chris Peet and bass player Don Gottlieb—and other area musicians, due out this spring. Stay tuned.

Hear more



myspace.com/jpsoars

key notes

[] Hot tracks: “The Gypsy Woman” (Muddy Waters cover), “Caladonia” (Lilly Jordan cover)

[] Live at: The Back Room Blues Bar, Boca Raton; The Downtowner, Fort Lauderdale; The Orange Door, North Palm Beach



THE PARTNERS IN ROCK

Maggie Dove and Aaron Gentry of The Freakin Hott
(with drummer Dean Vincent)



key notes

[] Hot tracks: "Brass Snatch," "Rotten Apple"

[] Live at: Poorhouse, Fort Lauderdale; Propaganda, Lake Worth; Dada, Delray Beach; Respectable Street, West Palm Beach

When asked where they'll be as a band in 10 years, Aaron Gentry and Maggie Dove from The Freakin Hott crack up.

"We are pretty agenda-less," says Dove, whose role in the trio comprises "vocal, tambourine, jiggle," according to their MySpace page. "If anything good happens, that's great; if anything bad happens, that sucks. But as long as we can keep doing what we're doing, we're happy to do it."

That has pretty much been their philosophy since Dove and Gentry (of Delray Beach) started dating and later began performing as a quirky acoustic-rock duo in 2003. Eventually, Gentry, on guitar, wanted to add a drummer to the mix, and Dove "fought him every step of the way because I liked it the way it was," she says. "When we finally added a drummer [Dean Vincent of Fort Lauderdale], we became a rock band. And it was so much better than anything I could have imagined."

Local audiences and critics agreed, and The Freakin Hott have been named "Best Local Rock Band" for three years by *New*

Times; they've also opened for Velvet Revolver, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, The Black Crowes, Journey and Def Leppard.

Citing "'70s glam rock, '80s bubblegum metal and New York City underground" as their musical influences, the band churns out straightforward, no-apologies rock, captured best on its 2006 release, "Slip on the Lips."

This spring, they're back in the studio recording their follow-up album with local rocker John Ralston. Despite their rising-star status—which Dove credits to having "the best friends and fans in the entire world"—The Freakin Hott don't have plans to get out of Dodge anytime soon.

"You've probably heard from a lot of local musicians who can't wait to get out of here," Gentry says. "They want to tour the nation and be signed to a label and go to other places. We're having a great time being a good local band."

Hear more



myspace.com/thefreakinhott

[Four From Boca]

These up-and-coming musicians show a lot of potential—and come from our own backyard.

1 **Zombies! Organize!!**

Sisters (from left) Laura and Mary Sheffield (daughters of local arts reporter Skip Sheffield) have teamed up with Bobby Jividen to “foment an undead rebellion against humankind”—which results in a campy indie-crunk sound. myspace.com/zombiesorganize



2 **Hilary McRae**

The soulful singer/songwriter was the first “developing artist” signed to Hear Music, the label launched by Starbucks Entertainment and Concord Music Group in 2007. Check out her debut album, “Through These Walls,” for a retro modern mix of pop and R&B. hilarymcrae.com



3 **The Pretty Faces**

Heavily influenced by late ‘70s punk rock, (from left) brothers Jeph and Tom Thorslund—and Jeph’s wife, Hannah—craft cleanly produced, New Wave garage rock. The trio released its sophomore album, “Another Sound,” in 2009. theprettyfaces.com



4 **Quiet River**

Front man Paul Simundich, wrote, recorded and produced Quiet River’s 2008 release, “Lokigrimm,” which features an acoustic rock structure with layers of vocalization and often-cinematic instrumentation added on top. The current lineup features (from left) Oz Del Castillo on bass, Matt Salcito on guitar, Simundich on vocals and Jeff Rose on drums. quietriverhigh.bandcamp.com

[Now Hear This]

Here's a roundup of our favorite live music venues in Palm Beach County.



FOR BLUES

B.B. King's Blues Club

550 S. Rosemary Ave., Suite 236, CityPlace,
West Palm Beach, 561/420-8600, bbkingclubs.com

The king of the blues has opened his latest venue in West Palm Beach, promising live music seven nights a week on two stages. So hit that dance floor and let the good times roll!



FOR ROCK

Propaganda Bar & Lounge

6 S. J St., Lake Worth, 561/547-7273

Under the "booking" section on its Web site, Propaganda insists: "We are not looking for mainstream rock."

What you'll hear here is wholly original tunes from area favorites and up-and-comers alike, blurring the lines between genres.



FOR JAZZ

The Cottage

522 Lucerne Ave., Lake Worth,
561/586-0080, thecottagelw.com

The dreamy courtyard at this Lake Worth restaurant is the perfect backdrop for grooving to live jazz on weekends; we particularly like the Sunday Jazz Brunch.

FOR CABARET

Royal Room

The Colony Hotel, 155 Hammon
Ave., Palm Beach, 561/655-5430,
thecolonypalmbeach.com

Enjoy a gourmet dinner and a world-class cabaret show in this intimate venue, which has seen the likes of Ben Vereen and Betty Buckley singing classic show tunes and standards—up close and personal with the audience.



FOR CLASSICAL

Kravis Center

701 Okeechobee Blvd.,
West Palm Beach,
800/KRAVIS-1, kravis.org

Groups like the Palm Beach Symphony and the Palm Beach Pops can be best appreciated in the Alexander W. Dreyfoos Jr. Concert Hall, with its stellar acoustics and state-of-the-art sound system.

VISIT VENUE WEB SITES FOR UPCOMING SHOW SCHEDULES AND MORE.



THE CHAMPION TEACHER

Joanna Craik



"I pass my excitement and passion for music on to my students."

Veteran music teacher Joanna Craik had barely settled into her new position as music director at Grandview Preparatory School before launching a lofty project, the Boca Raton school's Fine Arts Track, in 2007.

"My goal was to offer an elite, highly intensive arts program for middle and upper school students whose primary focus is to pursue their artistic talent," she says.

The program's first area of focus is voice, which Craik calls her "primary instrument," but she hopes to add dance, visual arts and drama soon. Participating students—this year had five, last year had three—receive three private voice lessons a week; study music theory, music history, basic piano skills and vocal technique; and work on building a repertoire of solo literature in a variety of styles and languages.

"This program is not offered at any other school in our area," Craik says. "These students have been extremely successful due to the quality and quantity of work they do in their lessons."

The program's first graduate, Mac Wal-

lach, went on to the musical theater program at New York University—and all five of the 2009/2010 Fine Arts Track students won spots in the American Choral Directors Association's competitive Regional Honor Choir.

Exposure to such opportunities isn't just limited to students on the Fine Arts Track. Craik has been encouraging her elementary school students to audition for the Florida Elementary All-State Choir since 2006, and Grandview kids have consistently been selected. In fact, four traveled to Tampa this January to perform with world-renowned conductor Henry Leck.

Craik credits her pupils' ongoing success to her passion. "I am extremely enthusiastic about vocal music, and I pass that excitement on to my students," says the Boynton Beach resident. "I show them how the music of Mozart and Beethoven is much more interesting than the music they hear on the radio today, and, by the end of the lesson, most of them agree."

Hear more

grandviewprep.net/1craik.htm

key notes

[] All in the family:

Craik's only child, Gabriel, is in the third grade at Grandview and sings in the school's glee club.

[] Class rule:

"I do not teach pop music," Craik says. "They have easy access to that on their own. My job is to teach them about great music that they might otherwise not be exposed to."



THE WIZARD OF SOUND

Fred Weinberg



"I enjoy every minute of it."

He has parachuted out of a plane, jumped into a lake and recorded ants walking on sand—all to capture a sound. Composer, sound designer and audio engineer Fred Weinberg has spent the last 40 years dedicated to the auditory arts, creating soundtracks and sound effects for movies, TV shows, commercials and records. The Boca Raton resident has garnered three Grammy nominations, an Emmy—and 28 Clios, the Academy Awards of advertising.

"I enjoy every minute of it," Weinberg says. "For example, I can produce an album, I love that. If I have an assignment to write music, I enjoy that. If I produce or supervise a group, I enjoy that. So every aspect of it, I've always enjoyed."

He traces his fascination for sounds back to his childhood in Colombia, where his parents (an opera singer and a concert pianist) fled from Europe to escape the Holocaust. Bereft of television or other forms of modern entertainment, Weinberg spent his time in the jungle, listening.

"When I came to the U.S. in the early '60s, I had never seen big buildings or television,"

he recalls. "I was fascinated."

He landed his first major gig by making some noise—literally.

"I was a sound engineer in a New York studio," he says. "I was beating a bass drum with a blanket and putting an echo on it. A guy was next door working on a movie, and he came over and said, 'Do you want to work on a promotion for 'Rosemary's Baby?'"

He counts that as a highlight of his career, which has included producing records for the likes of Tito Puente, Jose Feliciano and Paul McCartney. When we caught up with him, Weinberg had just finished mixing an album for area blues musician Jamie King Colton, working on the TV show "Woodstock: Now and Then" and doing a Tums commercial based on "The Jetsons."

"There's always something going on," he says. "And that's the way I like it." 🎧

key notes

[[Inside connections:

Through his Worldwide Music Partners booking company, Weinberg has worked with Ruben Blades, Dr. Ruth, Meat Loaf, Patti Russo, Queen Latifah and more.

[[Top clients: ABC, NBC, MTV, HBO, Discovery Channel, AT&T, Porsche

Hear more



fredweinbergproductions.com

Anthony Coniglio



Music Lessons

The power of music can be life changing—as evidenced by a young boy with diabetes who found a new lease on life at Lynn University's Preparatory School of Music.

Anthony Coniglio's world was rocked in March 2006 when the 9-year-old was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes.

"He was really upset," says his mother, Gail. "I really wanted him to filter that anxiety into something positive."

She decided to enroll Anthony in piano lessons at a local school. He took to the instrument so readily—flying through six weeks of lessons in just three weeks—that the teacher there recommended that Gail find a more serious place for Anthony to study in fall 2008.

They enrolled Anthony at the Preparatory School of Music, a program within the Lynn University Conservatory of Music. The school, which debuted in 1999, offers weekly private lessons on orchestral instruments, piano, guitar and voice to nurture budding young musicians of all ages. The program serves more than 150 students each year.

After a few weeks at the Preparatory School, Anthony was a different person.

"Both the playing of the music and the physiological effects of the music on his body—coupled with the emotional and psychological benefit of being able to master a song, perform it for somebody and then getting feedback—built his self-confidence back up."

In fact, although Anthony was previously shy about disclosing his illness to others, he has come to terms

with his diabetes and doesn't hide it anymore.

"The music healed this [boy]," Gail says.

Although it's an hour-long drive from their Davie home, mother and son agree that the trek is worth it.

"It's a wonderful school," Anthony says. "All the teachers, they're all really wonderful and have helped me to progress very quickly. Without them, I never could have been in the position I'm in. They're the best."

This October, three years after his first lesson, the seventh grader entered his first competition, the prestigious Music Teachers National Association (MTNA) Junior Performance State Piano Competition. Anthony won second place.

After that unexpected victory, Anthony, now 13, founded Music for Smiles, a volunteer program in which students perform at area charity events and assisted living facilities.

"I really like performing because, when they hear me play, it always puts a smile on their face," says Anthony, who is also a top student at Saint Mark Catholic School in Southwest Ranches.

Meanwhile, Anthony is preparing for the MTNA concerto competition this spring—and looking forward to his very bright future.

"He wants to be a concert pianist," Gail says. "He wants to go to one of the top schools and tour the world. He just loves performing."

[Local Music Schools]

[] Preparatory School of Music:

Conservatory of Music, Lynn University, 3601 N. Military Trail, Boca Raton (contact Luisa Fuentes, director of the Preparatory School, at 561/237-9013)

[] ASM Music Schools: 6076

Okeechobee Blvd., West Palm Beach, 561/964-6700, asmmusicschools.com (also three locations in Miami-Dade)

[] Jupiter Academy of Music: 500

Commerce Way, #9, Jupiter, 561/747-6878, jupiteracademyofmusic.com

[] Musikgarten of the Palm Beaches:

various locations throughout Palm Beach County, palmbeachmusicclasses.com

[] The Paul Green School of Rock

Music: 11650 U.S. Highway 1, North Palm Beach, 561/625-9238, schoolofrock.com