

Guitar Man

Ricky Jordan's helps young musicians hone their chops

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By Lisa Reisman
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No one ever told Shane Reiner, Madison's latest singing sensation, that making it big in the music business is about as easy as winning a gold medal on the balance beam.

At least it seems that way, from the 10-year-old's sleepy green eyes and carefree manner as he rocked and grooved with his band on a recent evening at Ricky Jordan's Guitar Instruction just off the Guilford Green.

Then again, not much fazes Reiner, according to his mother Joanie — in particular, singing and performing. From the time he was 3 or 4, it was clear the kid was a natural. Elvis, The Beatles, it didn't matter. When Shane started playing air guitar in front of relatives and neighbors, his parents realized it was time for professional help.

That's where Ed Soufer, an instructor at Ricky Jordan's school and himself one of Jordan's disciples, came in. Sure, Reiner could play by ear, but there was Reiner's outside talent to be harnessed. There was sight-reading to master, techniques to be honed and refined, chords to be studied and repeated, theories to grasp, practice habits to be learned.

All of which, it's plain, has



He's the guitar man - that's Ricky Jordan of Killingworth, left, who has been working with kids for years, many of whom like his former student and now instructor Ed Soufer of New Haven have gone on to careers in music. Photo by Mara Lavitt

tars, and trudged down the steps with their parents for homework and bed, their boyish exuberance still lingering in the air.

Not that Reiner is the first gifted student to come through the doors of the unassuming second-floor Water Street school, whose cozy confines and laid-back, no-frills atmosphere seem to belie the roughly 20,000 musicians it has produced since 1995. Just listen to the YouTube rendition of Steve Vai's "Jibboom" by Matt Horanzy, a senior at Madison's Daniel Hand High School who's been studying with Jordan for the last nine years. Listen to him make his guitar sing and moan



Above, the group, The Standing Ovation, rehearses. From left are Madison musicians Connor D'Aniello, Jacob Allen and Shane Reiner.

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and scream, to the jarring leaps and mind-altering segues, to the silky finger-picking, every note with its own life, its own personality, its own zip code.

You'll understand why Horanzy, as band captain of Hand High's highly decorated show choir, VIBE, a group that combines singing and dancing with a backup band, was named best instrumentalist at the Grand Championships of the New England Show Choir Festival last month, and a week later helped VIBE take home honors for Best Band at Lincoln Center in New York.

No wonder Horanzy's headed to the prestigious Berklee College of Music in Boston this September, the training grounds for such luminaries as Quincy Jones, Branford Marsalis and John Mayer. Considering such predecessors — and his own prodigious musical ability — it's only logical, it seems, for Horanzy to expect a major recording contract, critical acclaim, and packed arenas to follow.

Not in the least. His interest is in musical production, specifically the recording aspect.

"I'd love to be the guy behind the mixing studio, working with radio, live TV, live sound," he said in a voice as calm and nonchalant as his guitar chops are stagger-



Ricky Jordan helps Connor D'Aniello tune his guitar with Jacob Allen and Shane Reiner, all age 10 of Madison. Mara Lavitt photos.

ing. The reason: "I like the idea of being employed."

That's in perfect harmony with Jordan's philosophy, said Chris Worden, 15, a freshman at Guilford High School and another of his longtime students.

"Ricky is so easygoing you only realize after a lesson how much you've learned," he said. "And he's so good a musician that it's easy to get inspired." And it doesn't end with chords and scales. "He really makes a point of asking where you think you want to go, recommending colleges, letting you in on the realities of the music business."

Indeed, Jordan over the years has gently drummed into his countless students the balance beam principle.

"You can love making music, you can train yourself to be an accomplished musician, but in the end there are no guarantees," said Jordan, who himself endured the

rigorous training of a Berklee education and currently moonlights as the lead guitarist for Primo and the popular Sin Sisters Band. "You still eventually have to make a living."

That's why one of Jordan's former pupils composes jingles for Mattel Toy Company and another heads the web-based company Indaba Music, among the largest social networks for musicians in the world. Not to mention Ed Soufer who, along with his instructor duties at Ricky Jordan's, plays with the alternative rock group The Syndicate.

For Jordan, that's always been the objective. "There are ways to integrate music into your life and if I can help my students make that happen — you have no idea what a kick that is for me."

Of course, you never know. "Shane's a football player," Jordan said with a twinkle in his eye. He has no interest in performing acrobatic feats on a 4-inch balance beam.

Editor's note: Ricky's Guitar Instruction is located at 17 Water Street, Guilford. Phone: 203-671-5025; website: www.rickyjordanguitarinstruction.com. To hear Matt Horanzy, visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7CHJOK64EYA>.



The studio is tucked away on Water Street in Guilford.