

RELIGION

“That Johnny Kid” glorifies God with his guitar at Centreville Baptist

By E. BRUCE DAVIS
Observer staff

Johnny Cerisano ignites weekend crowds of more than 500 people by playing his electric guitar. He collects monthly receipts from iTunes while his CD, “Red Sky,” released in 2010, generates revenue, especially at his area gigs. His YouTube offerings have garnered 100,000 views and laudatory comments (“Absolutely fantastic. You Rock, Johnny”). He is a frequently featured guest performer, heady stuff for the artist known as “That Johnny Kid,” especially considering he turned 15 on Jan. 25.

Yet, success has not gone to his head. He recognizes his musical gifts are from God. He has been the praise band lead guitarist for three years at Centreville Baptist Church’s 11 a.m. contemporary service.

Johnny, the second oldest of John and Annette Cerisano’s eight children, is home-schooled. At eight he began studying piano, learning the basics of music. He also enjoyed playing his father’s tape collection.

“I listened to a Beach Boys tape, and I found I liked rock and roll,” Johnny said. His father played tapes of more recent artists, and Johnny took interest. “Dad had quit



Johnny Cerisano, holding his Inspire guitar in his studio (living room) of his home, plays at Centreville Baptist Church frequently. E. Bruce Davis / the Bull Run Observer

playing guitar but began playing drums at a youth detention center [as a ministry.] It got me more excited about music. I decided on the guitar over the drums.” He hoped he would get a \$100 guitar at Walmart for Christmas.

“I told him he wouldn’t receive the new guitar,” his father said. “I gave him something better, my Ibanez Roadstar II (RS530).” It

was restored to top-notch condition. He taught his son for about eight months, before asking his friend, Dan Leonard, an oft-honored guitarist, composer and teacher at the Chantilly Contemporary Music Center, to teach Johnny.

“I had gone to high school with John and taught him guitar, but Johnny was about 10 years old, and I told John I don’t teach students that young,” said Leonard. Johnny’s dad insisted that he was really good.

“Bring him back when he knows everything I taught you.” Six months later, he was back and knew his notes and scales. Johnny’s whole attitude is way ahead of his years. He is a natural, aware of developing a feel on the guitar and aware of sounds to get nuances.”

“There was not an immediate realization that this was my pas-

sion,” Johnny said. “But the more I played, I grew to love it. It grew into my passion. I had the inner struggle of playing for my own glory or God’s glory. Dad and Mom encouraged me not to play for my own glory.” Under Leonard’s tutelage, Johnny continued to progress with a style compared to Joe Satriani’s. He also began composing music.

His first performance, when he was 10, was before 30 people in Centreville Baptist Church’s sanctuary for a home school co-op. At 12 he played lead guitar in his first church musical, a production in which he has played ever since. He has performed at area coffee houses; he said he is humbled when Leonard shows him a new technique.

The Cerisanos converted their living room into a well-equipped recording studio, where That Johnny Kid started putting down tracks when he was 10. He completed “Lightning,” one of six songs he wrote and arranged on the 10-cut Red Sky, when he was 11.

“We lay down a scratch track when I have an idea,” Johnny said. He plays bass, rhythm and lead guitar (added last) and usually synthesizer on his recordings, while his father adds drums. With his father, he has learned how to dub, mix, employ effects, level and master. He enjoys engineering, writing and recording. His father and Reagan, his older sister, designed and produced the cover for Red Sky.

Johnny practices at least two hours a day. He is an entertaining performer whose lightning-fast fingers easily travel up and down his guitar’s fret board.

The industry has taken notice. A friend of the Cerisanos told Mark Tatum, president of Inspire Guitars,

“check this guy out.” Looking for the 2009 Inspire Guitar calendar year artist, Tatum listened to Johnny’s YouTube recordings. He then sent Johnny a letter confirming he had become the youngest guitarist ever chosen as a calendar year artist by Inspire Guitars. He asked Johnny to submit specifications of the Inspire model to be custom made for him. Based on Johnny’s, his father’s and Leonard’s input, Johnny received a red Inspire Sonic, Stratocaster type guitar with a modified fret board. He signed a four-year deal to represent Inspire Guitars. Tatum presented the guitar to Johnny at a Jammin’ Java coffee-house performance.

Except when he’s in church, That Johnny Kid has been a solo instrumental performer. “I would like to earn my living writing and performing Christian instrumental music as a guitarist,” he said.

That Johnny Kid’s Red Sky CD can be purchased online. His website, www.ThatJohnnyKid.com links to his videos and Facebook page.

Centreville Baptist Church, at 15100 Lee Highway, holds 8 and 9:30 a.m. services in addition to the 11 a.m. service at which Johnny plays. The church website is cbcva.org; its phone number is 703-830-3333.

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