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Wednesday

Molly Miller: a guitarists rise to the big stage



Caption: Molly Miller posing with guitar *Photo contributed by: Molly Miller*

From playing in her family band to opening and touring with artists like Zayne and Jason Mraz, 35-year-old guitarist/ songwriter Molly Miller is paving her way into the music industry with her original all-instrumental music.

Miller is the middle of five kids and since she could remember she was immersed in music.

“My parents were like let’s start a family band. Our first gig was the elementary school talent show,” Miller said. “And then we just kept doing it. My recollection was just ‘ok now we have a band’.”

Miller says that her parents wanted her to have “variation” in her extracurricular activities.

Miller begun her journey with songwriting in college, but it wasn’t until she started the Molly Miller Trio that she really dove into songwriting.

“Jen my band mate was super encouraging, she was like ‘We need an original record’,” Miller said. She said while she wrote some songs alone, she would also co-write her songs with Jen.

“We just started writing together,” Miller said. “I feel like [the songwriting] mostly came from Jen’s encouragement.”

Miller also teaches guitar at University of Southern California. Her teaching career started by offering 20-minute guitar lessons to kids, which escalated to teaching an all-girl rock band to teaching an improvisational class. While she enjoyed teaching, Miller knew her true dream was to be on stage performing.

“Everything in my life that I love happened very organically,” Miller said. When beginning her touring career Miller said she often was booked trio gigs. She said that Jennifer Condos and Jay Bellerose two “legendary studio people” were her number 1 choice when playing out somewhere. “I was kind of sick of the same tunes everyone had been playing,” Miller said. “I wanted to create my own repertoire.” With the help of Condos and Bellerose, Miller began writing more original music and started booking “proper gigs” for herself and the newfound trio.

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Caption: Jason Mraz and band taking bows after concert on July 6th, 2024. *Photo by: Claire Robertson*

Miller plays all instrumental music. With guitar as the lead and a bass and drum behind. But the question often comes up, why no lyrics? Miller explained that while she's worked with vocalists before she really enjoys listening and playing instrumental music. Her album "St. George" is an all-instrumental album that captures the feelings of Miller post breakup. "The songs are reflective of going through a breakup and just kind of feeling unsettled," Miller said. "The foundation of [the record] is searching for being a bit more grounded and making decisions that make me feel more grounded."

In her song "Whenever You Call" the lead guitar takes listeners on a melancholy journey of both heartbreak and hope while the drums are a subtle background noise that calms listeners. Opposite, the bass guitar adds a slight

unsettling feeling of not knowing what comes next in life.

In 2016 Miller's life would forever change when singer/songwriter Jason Mraz invited her to play a show with him. "I was working with a couple of different bands that Jason knew," Miller said. "One was with his best friend, Billy Galewood. I was playing guitar for him; I was also in this band called "The Vibrometers" and Jason was a fan of that band." Miller emphasized that she "organically" met Mraz through two close connections.

She says that Mraz must have liked her guitar playing because he invited her to a rare opportunity, to play a gig with Mraz himself. "I worked really hard to make sure I did a good job at the gig," Miller said. "I've been playing with him ever since." Miller will have been on tour with Mraz for eight years now.

Lead keyboardist Daniel Mandelman has been touring with Mraz for sixteen

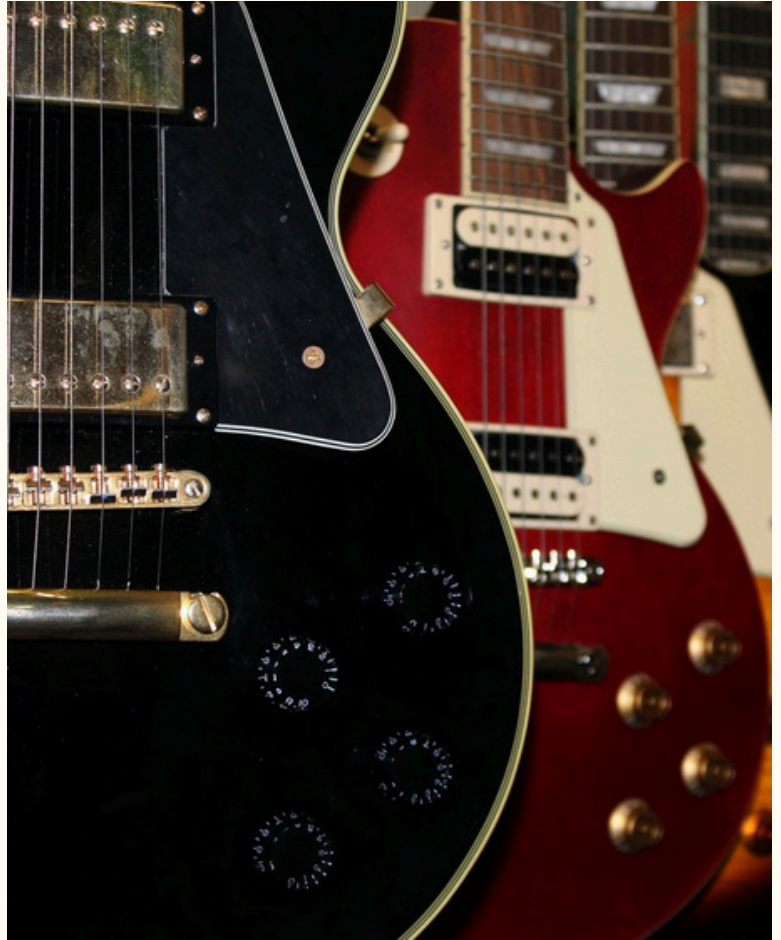
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years now and just like Miller, also met Mraz through Galewood. Mandelman described the band as a family. "When I play with Molly, I feel like I'm sixteen – seventeen years old playing in my mom's basement with my friends," Mandelman said. He said that the band often likes to play pickleball when they are not performing or rehearsing.

While Miller has a rare opportunity, she also has a commitment to her own band. She says that it's a "balancing act" between going on tour and writing her own albums. She explains that she's very fortunate since a lot of the time the touring dates align with her schedule. "Jason tours in summers," Miller said. "I can create my own tour schedules with my trio." Miller says the shows are the most amazing part of performing on stage with artists like Mraz and Zayne.

"I get to hang out with some of my really good friends and see the world," Miller said. Miller says that it was never her goal to be famous. It is important to Miller that she does things that are inspiring to her. She explains that you not only have to know what you want out of the industry, but you also must be yourself.

"I'm not trying to be Wes Montgomery or Jimmy Hendrix; I'm trying to be Molly Miller and the more you are yourself the more great things happen."



Caption: Close up picture of two guitars.

Photo by: Allison Garcia



Caption: Molly Miller performing on stage with guitar.

Photo contributed by: Molly Miller