



From NOLA to Tally, Jacob's Ladder keeps music in the family

# WORKING ON A DREAM

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Music runs deep in Devin Joseph's blood. It's how his parents met once upon a time in New Orleans. His father was a music producer and manager at a recording studio when Joseph's mother walked in with a friend who needed help with back up vocals on her upcoming recording. That's when Joseph's mother stepped in the booth to lend her voice, and the rest you might say is history. Several years later, Joseph and his siblings became part of the story, but were uprooted from their Louisiana home in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Joseph was only 5 years old at the time so his only memories of New Orleans were of his grandmother's house. The experience has left a lasting impression on the family and given them strength in all their endeavors.

"The storm took a toll on our family who had to just pack up and leave," says Joseph. "It's really helped us come a long way and has been our drive to achieve our goals. Knowing

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my heritage and where I've come from gives me extra fuel to put more into what I'm doing."

The focal point of his life so far has been music project Jacob's Ladder. Joseph and his siblings formed the band in 2009 with the encouragement of his parents. His sister Brianna Joseph, 18, and brother Ryan Joseph, 20, are both vocalists and guitarists, while he adds to vocals and plays bass. All home-schooled, the siblings were able to devote time and energy to their music, and Joseph, now 16, has played with the band at many local Tallahassee events and venues.

He says the band name came from the idea that they were the connection between the people and a higher power, and that their music would have them be messengers of hope and redemption. Though the first band practice was admittedly awkward since Joseph and his siblings were unsure of how to work with one another, he says it's far smoother nowadays and that they feed off of one another's specialities.

"I admire their writing ability," says Joseph. "We collaborate all together, but Ryan can really string some words together that make you feel some type of way and Brianna can do the same."

He says the typical process for writing a new song begins when the group comes together and brainstorm ideas. Sometimes they come up with melodies in their head, and other times they start from scratch, playing simple chords on a guitar or bass and adding onto that. Joseph emphasizes the harmonious nature in which they all engage in their music making through jam sessions, often transcending initial annoyances and using the familial connection to help make the process go faster.

Joseph sees his own strength in coming up with chord progressions and sometimes will add lyrics to the band's growing list of 30 original songs. Self-taught, he practices five hours a day, and the first song he ever learned on guitar was Eric Clapton's "Tears in Heaven." Lately, as his tastes are shifting and changing, he has started focusing his energies on the piano. He looks to musicians like Harry Connick Jr., John Baptiste, Miles Davis, and Victor Wootton for their musical abilities and passion. As he's matured over the past seven years, jazz and neo-soul have given Joseph a new groove that inspire his band's chord progressions, but his deepest inspirations are rooted in his family.

"I've learned different techniques from Brianna and Ryan so that when I go into the process I don't just sit there, drown myself, and become bored," explains Joseph on altering his writing process. "My parents were also the inspiration from the start for the music, and they've taught me lots of ways to stay organized and focused. I've learned that wherever I want to be in life and whatever I want to do in life I just have to work hard, never stop pushing."

Joseph's goal is for as many people as possible to hear their music. Jacob's Ladder's songs get at deep emotional themes that sing about love, truth, identity, and self-empowerment. He enjoys the group's eclectic blend of acoustic pop, hip-hop, R&B, reggae, and gospel, and finds their lyrics to be inspirational. His favorite is "Free That Man," which talks about knowledge as freedom, and "What You Do" for the romantic composition that puts him in a happy mood.

The band does many covers and mash-ups as well. Their YouTube video blending together "Ain't No Mountain High" and "As Long as You Love Me" has received numerous views, but Joseph says he enjoys playing Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On" the most. It's the song's bass line that entices him, and reinforces his belief that instrumentation is one of the most important aspects of music.

"I hope listeners will experience self-enlightenment and societal enlightenment," says Joseph. "You don't have to be a certain way to impress other people, and who you are is the best quality about you. Music is an important vehicle to incorporate that message and open up people's ears."

The band chooses their set lists based on their audience, and have performed in a variety of spaces. Joseph says the most memorable have been at the Mayor's Brunch, Tallahassee Nights Live, and Food Truck Thursday. He's excited that Jacob's Ladder will be performing there again this summer, on Thursday, June 23, at the Lake Ella Shops. It's a particular favorite since they play from sunset until dusk, and have also had the largest crowds.

In preparation for performances, Joseph credits local musicians Mike Williams, Timothy Clark, Evan Powell, and Gerald Watkins, as being extremely influential in his music education. They've given him tips and tricks that have helped his musicianship and journey as an artist. In one instance, Clark came in when he was practicing for a previous Food Truck Thursday, and helped him to accentuate his bass line so that it sounded fuller.

"At Food Truck Thursday people can just get up and dance whenever they want to," says Joseph, who says Jacob's Ladder will premiere new songs at the upcoming performance. "We get to carry over into the nighttime and when the lights come on and you see everybody out there it's really nice."

Though Joseph believes that being in this band and sharing in the joys of music with his family is already one of his greatest accomplishments, he'll know he's truly made it in music when he headlines Madison Square Garden and has aspirations of traveling all over the world. China is at the top of his list, but first, he has his sights set on auditioning for Julliard's jazz program and the opportunities it will afford him as a budding musician.

He is learning more about the music industry every day when entering the family's home recording studio to get out Jacob's Ladder's first EP, or collection of songs. Working with different producers, he sees how their ideas inform his chord progressions and make arrangements better. Though he will soon receive private tutoring in music theory, his time with Jacob's Ladder has given him hands-on knowledge that far surpasses what he might find in a book. The band's motto, "Live the Dream," perfectly lines up with Joseph's own inner mantra.

"Time moves fast so you have to use every second and every moment in your life to work on your goals and your dreams," says Joseph. "When I'm playing an instrument, the passion of what I'm playing just pours out of me, and jazz music helps that passion to flow. I get lost in it and it just takes me away."

*Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture ([www.tallahasseearts.org](http://www.tallahasseearts.org)).*