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Southington



♣ Bobby Drown looks forward to racing in a car he built. Page 12. Photo by Mara Dresner

♣ Making, producing and teaching music are Jamie Sherwood's life. See story on page 7. Photo by Lisa Brisson



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Neighbors

Jamie Sherwood's got the music in him

by Mara Dresner

Like many musicians, Jamie Sherwood grew up in a house full of music. He remembers his father playing the organ, especially songs from the 1940s.

While everyone in the family played by ear, music became more than a passing interest when he was just becoming a teenager.

That's when he got his first guitar. He can't remember what kind it was; all he knows is that it was from Sears.

"Once I got my own guitar, it was over. It was non-stop," he said.

Mr. Sherwood went on to pursue the guitar seriously.

But not just one or two genres. He plays classical guitar from renaissance to 20th century music; electric guitar for jazz, blues and rock; finger guitar for folk, ragtime and Delta blues; all styles of bass guitar, plus the mandolin, dobro and oud, a Middle Eastern instrument.

He received training from the Hartt School at the University of Hartford, where he received a bachelor of music and a performance degree in classical guitar, and at the Worcester School of Performing Arts.

"A lot of people focus on one kind of music. They like to stay with one thing," he said. "Once you go to music school, you learn that good music is just good music."

After Hartt, Mr. Sherwood lived in West Hartford before moving to Southington. He was drawn to the rural aspect of this town and felt that in West Hartford he "couldn't get the land, couldn't get the beauty" that he could here.

His house is also home to SherStudios, where he records his own work and produces other artists. He has played on hundreds of recordings for artists locally, as well as in New York and Los Angeles, and has worked with platinum-selling producer Mike Chapman and Grammy-winning songwriter Holly Knight.

"I do a lot of studio work. I work with a lot of bands. I've learned to appreciate each genre for what it is, to hear the best of each genre," said Mr. Sherwood.

He admits it is a bit unusual to play so many different instruments, especially ones such as the dobro.

"Those are usually taught by rote, family member by family member, rather than structured like classical music," he said.

He also taught himself to play the oud.

"That's very ethnic. It's a passed-down style of music. People grow up with it ... I learned to play it by ear," he said.

"Each one (instrument) is a separate being, but they're all related. There's some crossover, whether you play with a pick or your fingers. But the tuning of the strings is different on each one. That's the difficult part, remembering one to the next."

He believes that learning new instruments makes

knowledge. Jamie has been blessed with perfect pitch, which means he can hear a song and play it back on his instrument just the way it was played," said Tom Baxer of Tom Baxer Music in New Britain, who is

also a professional musician. "Once he hears it, it's

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Sherwood/7

tem. My favorite comment (about Jamie) is that he can hear paint dry, his hearing is so accurate."

Recording studio as laboratory

For his latest recording, "Songs from the Lab," Mr. Sherwood took a new approach. Typically there is a band and the recording naturally follows after the band has been playing for a while.

"This is the first time I've gone out solo. I've always gone out under a band moniker, but I didn't want the hassle of finding a band first," he said.

"I decided to try to write a song a week. I ended up writing two a week. I wrote the entire album in a month. It just flew out of me," he added. "I recorded it just as fast. I played every instrument except the drums, and then I found the band. Then we started playing out. It was like a reverse process."

Jamie Sherwood and the Rockwells will play at Zen Bar, 270 Farmington Avenue, Farmington, on January 24.

"The reason it's called 'Songs from the Lab' is that the studio is more like a laboratory than a traditional studio. I didn't want to be bogged down with one song genre. Every song, I think, is unique in itself ... the unifying thing is my voice," said Mr. Sherwood.

"He's the ultimate musician," said Mr. Baxer, who's known him since he was a student at Hartt. "His new CD is very creative ... the whole secret of being a musician is not sounding like someone else."

Russ Quinn, who plays bass with Jamie Sherwood and the Rockwells, agreed, saying, "Jamie is a phenomenal musician. He writes really good songs ... he's a huge fan of the song."

"It's not about the individual instruments, it's more about the overall structure of the song. That's what he does very well. He writes very well-crafted songs. They're awesome to play live."

Mr. Sherwood isn't stingy about sharing his talents and takes pride in helping other musicians reach their potential. He teaches 60 private lessons every week, what he calls "second shift work," between 4 and 10 p.m., leaving earlier in the day and late nights for studio work. Originally, most of his studio clients were students; now there's a mix of students and other musicians.

"My style as a producer is absolutely to take what the artist is and to amplify it, not to change it," he said.

"I want to make everyone sound like an individual. I don't want everyone to sound like they came out of SherStudios. I want to make everyone sound unique ... I try to give everyone a shot at being the best they can be.

"In some studio situations, the person in the studio just presses buttons. I don't do that. I want to make it as good as it can be instead of holding back."

Mr. Quinn learned to play guitar from Mr. Sherwood and has recorded his own music at SherStudios.

"Instead of everything coming out of one head, he's someone to collaborate with. He's a very big fan of songs and what makes songs work," said Mr. Quinn.

Mr. Sherwood likes to listen to new music.

"I like things that push boundaries, that's never been done before. That gets my blood pumping."

Some of his favorite bands include Radiohead, the Hives, OK Go, Wolf Mother and Jet. Don't ask him to listen to Gwen Stefani, though. And forget about



Jamie Sherwood plays everything from ragtime to renaissance music.

inviting him to watch "American Idol."

"I don't like and don't respect the whole 'American Idol' process. It's creating careers from karaoke, and that's not what it should be," he said.

"They crush people. They could take every one of those losing people and bring them into my studio, and we could create a great record ... it used to be that they would sign artists and weren't expecting a hit until the third album. Now they expect it to be instant."

For him, success has never been "about the fast buck."

When it comes to being a musician, Mr. Sherwood advises, "be it because you love it ... my goal has always been to make something you want to hear again and again." **Sol**

Visit jamiesherwood.com or sherstudios.com for information.

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