

PG LOCAL ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

Rich May

This month, we catch up with Rich May, a local singer/songwriter in Pleasant Grove.

With his earliest music experience on the piano, Rich grew into additional instruments, had a knack for live performance with a number of toe-tapping bands, and has dozens of songs that he's written to share with his posterity.

Where are you from, Rich?

I grew up in Los Angeles until I was around 12 years old, after which my family moved to Ojai in Ventura County. I spent most of my early years in Southern California. After I was married, I lived in Texas, Colorado, and eventually Birmingham, Alabama for 30 years, which was a wonderful experience.

I moved to Pleasant Grove about 3 years ago to be closer to my family.

What are some of your earliest memories of music?

My mother's family was very musical. My grandfather was a very skilled musician, and my mother was a proficient piano player. I was surrounded by music growing up, which was something I very much enjoyed.

When I was 9 years old, my mother initially began teaching me the piano, but later signed me up for piano lessons with a dedicated piano teacher. I learned a lot about piano chords and general music theory in those years. However, I absolutely hated going to piano recitals! While I did enjoy playing the piano by myself, I hated the pressure of playing music in a formal setting in front of people.

When my grandfather passed away, his musical equipment and instruments were passed down to my family. I was drawn to his acoustic guitar. I picked up the guitar and began to teach myself how to play. One of the best ways that I learned to play was playing along to popular songs on the radio.

In time, I expanded my musical interests into new opportunities. I joined a band where I began to play the comb and jug, and we would tour around the area playing music in the community.



In college, my roommates were musicians. The three of us formed a small band and began to play gigs at BYU and around the area. Eventually, that band disbanded, as members began to get married. Over the years, I was in various bands and had lots of fun musical opportunities. My primary instrument was the harp (harmonica), but I enjoyed playing a number of instruments with the groups that I performed with.

Over time, I also began to learn how to record my own original songs. About 20 years ago I recorded a full album of songs that I had written. It was a dream of mine for my children and grandchildren to have access to my music for posterity - to show my family line of the passion that I have for music. And since that time, I've written many additional songs. I now have enough content to record another two albums, which I plan to begin next year.

Who are your biggest music influences?

I really love the sound of blues rock. That love led to my interest in playing the harmonica, which has become one of my main instruments. Some of the artists that influenced my music and interests include Ry Cooder (guitar, mandolin), Tommy Emmanuel (guitar), Paul Butterfield (Chicago blues), and John Mayall (British blues).

I also really liked Taj Mahal. In Southern California, I used to go for drives to various music venues with my harmonicas in my pocket to listen to local music acts. If I liked the sound of the band, and I was feeling brave, I'd ask if I could sit in and play harmonica along with them. Occasionally they'd allow me to, which was a lot of fun.

One time I was watching a band, and they sounded incredible. I loved their music! I asked if they'd allow me to blow harp with them, and they kindly turned me down. The next day, I was in the local record store and saw a new record release by a guy named Taj Mahal. I did a double-take at the picture on the cover of that record album - I couldn't believe it! That was the guy that I had heard and talked to the night before! I laugh about it now, that I would be so bold as to ask someone like that if I could sit in, but I didn't know who they were. It was a very memorable experience, and I've loved following Taj ever since that time.

What instruments do you play?

I play the guitar and harmonica, and I have played some keyboard as well. I also have a few recorders that I break out from time to time. That's about it.

What does your creative process look like for your original songs?

I tend to get ideas when I'm exercising or busy with other things. When some inspiration strikes, I will usually stop what I'm doing and immediately record my idea right into Voice Memos on my smart watch (which is a very handy tool to have at hand!). I get ideas for lyrics or a melody line, which I'll either sing into the notes as a voice memo or explain in words. I usually review those notes later and find the idea nuggets that I can compile and build into a song.

My son-in-law is a terrific guitar player and we have similar



song writing styles. I've really enjoyed writing music with him in the past.

For me personally, it seems that my lyrics often come first, and then I build chords around the idea. Really, it's a matter of organizing ideas that come to mind, and later sitting down to structure a song from those ideas. You have to be organized in some way, or that inspiration slips away.

How would you describe your music?

Most of my music is acoustic singer-songwriter style. I tend to write more folk, country and blues music. I like to write toe-tapper songs that have a fun beat and a positive message.

Which of your songs is your absolute favorite?

That's a tough question. "Lullaby No. 5" is a song that I submitted to the songwriter competition last year, and I would say that it is the song closest to my heart.

When I was a graduate student, my wife worked at night to help support our family. I used to sing my children songs when I was helping to put the kids to bed. I would sing fun popular songs to keep their attention, but by the fifth song I needed a lullaby that my kids would fall asleep to. I wrote Lullaby No. 5 based on that experience.

What are your next plans with music?

I'm excited to release my first official album through all music streaming platforms in January. I've had this album as a private release for my family for years, but it's now all lined up for a full public release to kick off the new year!

My goal is to have my second album recorded and ready for release by the end of next year. Who knows where it will go from there.

What other interests do you have outside of music?

Up until last year, I was very competitive as a triathlete. I still bike and swim every week to keep healthy. My wife and I love spending time together playing games and enjoying the company of our two dogs. We also love spending time with our growing extended family.



What advice would you give to anyone in our community that is interested in songwriting or making music?

Wherever you may be in your music experience and journey, take time to enjoy it. Find time to focus on your music so that you don't let time slip by without reaching your goals. Let your musical light shine - you never know who is listening and who's life you may be impacting.

MUSIC LINKS



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Rich May



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