

## ARTS &amp; ENTERTAINMENT

# Quincy Bullen:

## A Quintessential Star In The Making



By Ingrid Walter  
PRIDE Columnist

His young fingers skip, hop and glide across the piano keys like a seasoned musician, his lean frame poised on his stool, his head slightly bent as he focuses intently, displaying the confidence of a pianist born to perform. At 15, Quincy Bullen is a teenage Jazz sensation, thrilling Jazz lovers not only in Toronto but at festivals far away from home.

At seven, this grade eight graduate of the New Conservatory of Music in Scarborough kicked off his career, performing to an audience of an estimated eight thousand at Mel Lastman Square. His gig list is long and includes the Toronto Jazz Festival, the Beaches International Jazz Festival, Partis Gras at the Toronto Distillery District, the Niagara Smooth Jazz Festival, more in Canada and others in the Caribbean. Talk in music circles is this new Canadian kid on the block could herald the second coming of a Ramsey Lewis, maybe even a Count Basie.

"He is already a stylist and has total independence in terms of left hand, right hand control. Q's touch is secure and original giving him a voice of his own," says Eric Mercury, a music producer and songwriter, who has worked with Stevie Wonder, Thelonus Monk, Donny Hathaway and others.

Named after Quincy Jones, known as "Q", the African American Jazz and music producer whose 76 Grammy nominations and 26 wins made him a legend, Quincy's talent, says Norm Sebourin, Canadian music producer and Quincy's former music teacher, is part nature, part nurture.

"At five years old, he used to bob his head to the rhythm. He's gifted, it's in his genes and his father exposed him to a lot of music in his studio," says Sebourin.

His father, Eddie Bullen, a Toronto-based music producer and performer, who admits he has a bit of Earl Woods in him, lovingly pushes his "Tiger" to excel. "I push, I tell him you can



Quincy Bullen, photo by Larry Lee

do it," says Bullen, who is now helping "Q", as he also likes to call him, put the finishing notes on his first CD as part of a teenage quartet called The Quintessential Boys. Scheduled for a launch on April 29 at the Bathurst Street Jazz club, Trane Studio, it demonstrates not only Quincy's dexterity on the piano, but his talent as a young composer.

Quincy's Holy Montuno, the number six song on the CD is a spirited piece, infused with the sweet sounds of Caribbean steel pans, that harkens back to his family's Grenadian roots. It also speaks volumes about this teenager's determination.

"I created it from a classical song I heard and liked when I was a little boy, I kept three chords from that song in my head," says Quincy.

The CD titled, Quintessential Boys Underage, features Quincy on piano, 17-year-old Rob Christian on saxophone and flute, Omar Gittens, 18, on drums and Lucian Gray, 16, on bass guitar. It boasts eleven jazz songs, three of which are composed or co-composed by Quincy.

While fans have to wait until April 29 to sample the CD, some lucky Schulich School of Business students enrolled in its Non-profit Management and Leadership

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The Quintessential Boys

Program got a pre-launch taste, when Quincy performed with bass player, Andrew Stewart, at a York University dinner last month.

"Because of his age and talent I was so inspired when he came the last time that I insisted he come back," said Anne Pyke, Senior Manager of the United Way of Greater Toronto and a funder of the university program.

Whether in a crisp, white shirt and tailored pants, playing a tribute to Oscar Peterson at the 2006 African Canadian Achievement Awards or dressed down in blue jeans and a t-shirt, funky runners and two diamond earrings, one in each ear, Quincy is already a charmer.

He could simply rely on his good looks, but reels in his audience with little anecdotes of his life with dad, his mentor, music teacher and now CD producer.

"Oh Yeh!!" he shouts to the audience at his last performance as his father talks about his composition Holy Montuno, soliciting roars of laughter with the story of his dad's so called "cool" when his hands first touched his eldest son's freshly packaged first CD.

"There is a lot of his father in him," says Andrew, who normally plays with the older Bullen, known for his confidence on stage and signature tan leather shoes.

Most people know Quincy's dad as the Juno award-winning brain behind Thunder Dome Studios in Toronto, the songwriter, arranger and producer, who has collaborated with such music icons as Deborah Cox, Glenn Lewis, Fefe Dobson, Liberty Silver, George Baton and Maestro, to name a few.

However, the music line in the Bullen family stretches back a generation to Grenada where Bullen's father owned a popular music store and was a jazz musician who traveled, entertaining jazz lovers throughout the Caribbean.

Apart from the Jazz in his veins, Quincy has been listening to the artform from in the womb and has a definite bias. Although he studied classical music to grade 8, he prefers playing Jazz.

"It's fun, it can please almost any audience, we even have hip hop jazz," says Quincy who in appropriate form for his age, heads straight for his skate board after his university performance.

His mother, Jooney Bullen, tries to provide a nurturing home environment for Quincy, her third of four sons. Both parents support his love of music and the arts and are actively involved in making sure he pays enough attention to his academic studies at Unionville High School of the Arts.

They also help him balance the demands of an acting career, which includes commercials, stage and movie roles. In three years Quincy has starred in the Canadian production of Yartzeit, sharing the stage with Canadian actor, Paul Soles, played a principal role in CTV's 11th Hour, snagged a spot in a Kraft Dinner commercial and,

most recently, landed the lead role in a US commercial for the Internet provider, Road Runner, and Master Card.

While acting is fun and has many rewards, Quincy says, "I would love to go to university and study music. I

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want to get a scholarship." So far, his father has largely provided his Jazz education.

"I teach him about the history of Jazz every chance I get," says Bullen who has exposed Quincy to many Jazz greats and takes him to jam sessions where he gets the opportunity, on occasion, to play with musicians like Don Thompson, Arturo Tappin, Jeffery Osborne and Dave Koz.

"My family is always behind me. So many kids don't have their family supporting and encouraging them," he says not knowing that his performance at the Schulich School of Business was, in part, an attempt by United Way's Pyke to show the star power that can come from a child with loving and supportive parents.

At 15 Quincy Bullen's star is certainly rising — quintessentially. **PRIDE**

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