

Talented teenager triple-threat musician

BY CHRIS TRABER
Staff writer

With a musical reputation, repertoire and reverence that belies his 14 years, Rob Christian is a triple-threat musician with a new CD aptly titled *Double Take*.

A featured and oft-sought performer in his Markham and throughout Toronto, Rob and his trio of 18-year-old brother Scott and Mark Kitchen are gaining renown for performances that entertain and bridge generations, delivering jazz, latin, classical and popular music.

With teen idol good looks and the kind of confidence afforded by talent, the young flutist, saxophonist and drummer has been busy with performances at the Beaches Jazz Festival, Unionville Festival, Markham Jazz Festival and Newmarket's Celebration of the Arts.

He has also been named to the Ontario Provincial Honour Band, made up of the best secondary school musicians in the province.

Not bad for a child who first picked up the instruments at age 11.

"I'm surrounded by jazz a lot," the Grade 10 Unionville High School student said. He was referring to the 20-piece Not Affiliated Big Band managed by his mother, Julie.

"Long before I started playing flute, my brother played in the band and they rehearse in our basement every Sunday."

Influenced by jazz and soul legends Miles Davis, Ray Charles and

Canada's Moe Koffman, Rob opted for the flute as an alternative to piano lessons he didn't enjoy.

"I study classical flute with Geza Farkas and jazz flute with Bill McBirmie, who I think is the best jazz flutist in the world," he said.

"Classical music gives me technique and strength. It's expressive and more complicated. Jazz gives me so much more freedom. If I were to go on professionally, I'd most definitely be a jazz flutist."

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That could be a solid career choice. Rob plays lean and mean. *Double Take*, available through his website, is an interpretive and tasty tribute to jazz and funk standards such as A Foggy Day, My Funny Valentine, This Masquerade and Mercy, Mercy, Mercy.

He demonstrates his musical talents with crisp phrasing, exquisite soloing and bouncy improvisation. Make no mistake: The teenager has chops.

The music's mature, sophisticated and true. And, unlike some self-published pressings, this merits play.

Rob is the product of a musical family, save for the matriarch, who claims she "only plays the radio". His father, Ron, plays occasional piano for the trio.

"Rob took piano lessons from

age six," Mrs. Christian said. "It never really took, so we told him he could drop it if he picked another instrument.

"He started flute lessons at age 11. By Grade 7, he was so advanced that he took up alto saxophone at school. He also plays drums. Rob is very self directed. I never have to nag him to practise."

Dutifully, she handles her son's business affairs. "I'm more of a 'momager,'" she said with a giggle.

"It's a lot of hard work for my mom," Rob said. "She's my booking agent and takes care of paying royalties for the songs on the CD. It's the honest thing to do. If I wrote music, I'd want to be paid for it, too."

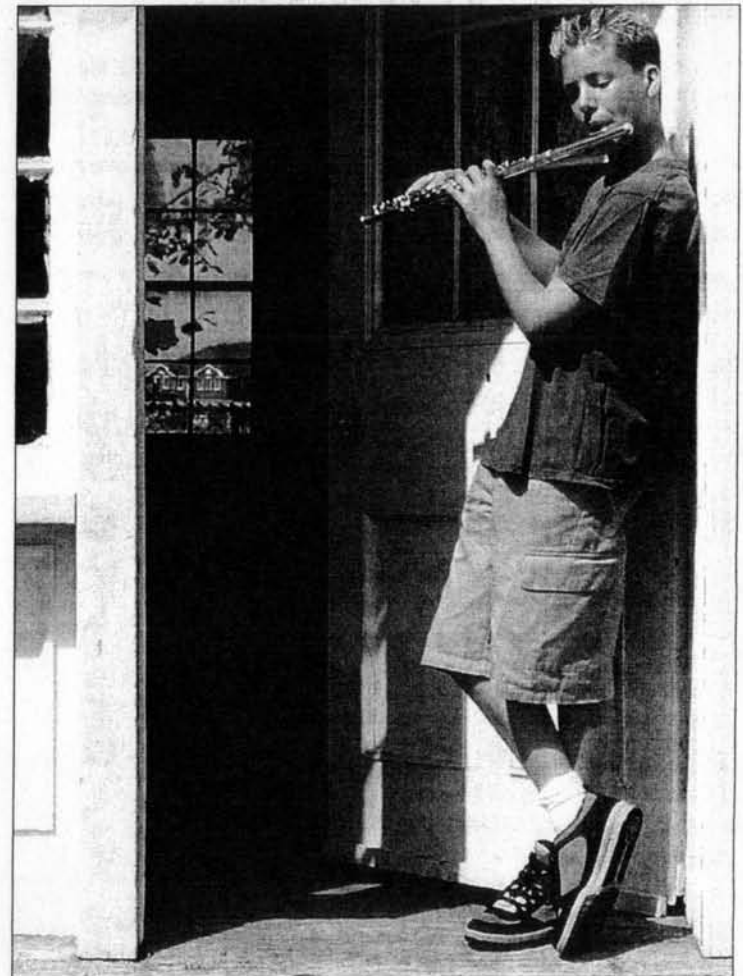
Unaffected by his growing musical notoriety, Rob practises daily and pursues athletic interests including skateboarding, baseball, hockey and lacrosse.

With a 76-per-cent average, he's a grounded teenager who enjoys hanging with friends and listening to what's vogue.

As for his future, he's considering music at Humber College or the University of Toronto.

"After that, it would be a dream if I could join a great jazz band with great musicians and tour. I also think that I'd like teaching, inspiring others and reaching out to children. Maybe I'll be a grade school music teacher."

For performance schedules log on to , www.robchristianflute.ca



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Rob Christian of Markham plays flute, saxophone and drums. He was among the performers at this year's fourth annual Celebration of the Arts competition