

Fortunate Son

Billy Raffoul finding his own way as career musician



Leamington native and Cardinal Carter graduate Billy Raffoul is putting the finishing touches on his debut album.

(Windsor, Ontario, Friday, June 9, 2017) – “Where do you see yourself in 10 years?”

Billy Raffoul was in a Grade 10 careers and civics class at Cardinal Carter Catholic High School in Leamington when he had to answer that question.

“I remember writing down that I want to be a professional musician and work hard enough to be offered a record deal and I’ll take the first one I can get,” he said.

His teacher Marco Antonuzzo circled his answer and wrote, “Don’t take the first deal. You’ll make them work for you.”

Years later, a signed agreement with Interscope Records in his back pocket and working on his debut album, Raffoul thanked his teacher for the advice. The story is an example of the confidence, support and sense of community Raffoul said he gained at Cardinal Carter. It helped mould him as a musician and as a man.

Antonuzzo said Raffoul was a respectful student who was very attentive and passionate about the subjects he learned. During one Grade 12 university history class, for instance, Raffoul wrote an especially insightful paper comparing music and instruments from medieval times to the Renaissance. He also remembers jamming to a Jimi Hendrix song with the young musical prodigy on stage.

“His musical soul is just so deep,” Antonuzzo says, pointing to the richness and depth of the 22-year-old’s voice on his track [Driver](#). “He’s beyond his years in his musical instincts.”

And he remembers Raffoul’s humble and respectful attitude. In an industry where some musicians step on others to move up, he said it’s refreshing to see Raffoul maintain his humility while achieving success.

“Billy was just Billy.”

The son of popular musician Jody Raffoul, and Lisa Raffoul, credits several teachers and students for helping him find his way from Leamington to Nashville, where he is working on his album. The untitled debut is set for release this summer.



Teachers like David Montminy were especially helpful. The former Cardinal Carter music teacher was there when Raffoul was getting ready to perform the Beatles’ *Blackbird* during his first talent show.

“You’re going to do great. Just go!” Raffoul remembers Montminy saying then laughing. “He shoved me up there.”

Montminy also performed a Kings of Leon song with Raffoul, his younger brother Peter and fellow students Adam Beckett and Kyle Mastronardi. On July 6, Raffoul and his band—drummer and vocalist Justin Zuccato, another Cardinal Carter alumnus, and bassist/vocalist Sara Keden from Connecticut—will be performing on the same bill with Kings of Leon at the British Summer Time Fest in London’s Hyde Park. Other headliners in the weeklong fest include Phil Collins, Green Day and Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers.

An aunt recently told Raffoul she remembers him playing the song *Use Somebody* that night. “Now I get to hear it live,” she said.

Raffoul’s positive school experiences and influences started early at St. Louis Catholic Elementary School where his mother once taught before she had a family.

“It was kind of like a rite of passage. Our entire family went there before me, for years and generations.”

The small school community and stable staff helped give him some of his best memories. He especially praises Earl Skidmore, John Murracas and Paulette Bondy as influential teachers.

In high school, he remembers Montminy bringing into class his guitars and love of music and sharing that passion with his students. The school band, talent shows and after-school choir all left indelible marks.

Another teacher who was also into music and left his mark was Chris Mazar, an Oasis fan.

“These are the teachers that, you know, hung around a lot in high school. The music was very present,” said Raffoul who also credits teachers Brad Chambers, Paul Sperduti, Lindsay Longpre, Paul George and Colin Lesperance.

Raffoul’s Cardinal Carter circle extends beyond his teachers. His girlfriend Bianca Salive is an alumna and Zuccato’s mother, Peggy Tracey-Zuccato, heads the Special Education Department at the school.

It was during high school that Raffoul got his big break in the music business. The great flamenco guitarist Pavlo, a friend of his father’s, noticed him and arranged to have him play for The Agency in Toronto.

“Before the night was over, Billy was signed,” Pavlo told The Windsor Star in 2013. “That hardly ever happens.”

Raffoul, who maintains a friendship with Pavlo, has signed with new managers in Vector Management in Nashville. Ever the humble, respectful young man, he points out that he asked his former manager Pavlo for his blessing before switching managers and received his wholehearted support.

Raffoul divides his time between the Music City, where he has an apartment, and Los Angeles, where he is recording his album. And while he pines for the day when a Canadian hockey team wins the Stanley Cup again, he marvels at the support Nashville is giving its Predators as it does just about everything else in the city.

Including the music?

“It goes without saying,” he adds. “The music’s on another level there.”