

Growing up a rock 'n' roller

Playing before 50 or so fans in the WOW Hall in downtown Eugene on a Saturday night can only mean one of two things for a lead vocalist and guitarist — his career is either on the way up or the way down.

Wyatt Richter is definitely on his way up, in more ways than one. Standing about four-and-a-half feet tall and weighing 80 pounds, Richter still has some growing ahead. At 10 years of age, he also has some growing up to do.

And despite the fact that his hands are barely big enough to reach both hyperphase and thrust at the same time or to grip the threads of a pee-wee football, Richter already can "stretch the frets" of a guitar as well as many professionals twice his age.

"I want to be a rock-and-roll star," says Wyatt matter-of-factly after his one-hour performance, in between bites of a bagel.

Salvaging a chunk of cream cheese that has gravitated to his blue jeans, he admits he is not immune to the adulation and applause he draws. "I like it. It makes me feel real good."

While performances featuring pre-pubescent youngsters, namely Wayne Newton and Donny Osmond, historically have produced nausea in most true rock 'n' roll fans, Richter's

performance is different.

Despite poor sound mixing, his voice comes through with a strong, medium-pitch that does justice to the lyrics of such classics as "China Grove" and "Smoke on the Water."

His guitar, which is nearly as tall as he, is cocked at the proper angle. There are no exaggerated pelvic thrusts or on-stage antics. Rather, the music gets his message across.

"I love to watch him up there," says his mother, Patti, cutting short the thought to join in the applause. "You can tell he loves being up there."

Wyatt, who is adopted, has dark, kinky hair and light brown skin. While he looks like a typical 10-year-old, he has a street-wise air about him.

Wyatt's father, Bob Richter, plays bass guitar and Mike James mans the drums. They are both competent musicians, but they clearly defer to Wyatt on stage.

"But when he gets off the stage, he's just like any other 10-year-old," says Patti. "He likes Pac-man and that kind of stuff, and he likes girls. He's girl crazy."

His mother says success hasn't gone to his head.

"He has to keep his grades up. He has to maintain a B average or we won't let him do this," she says. "He doesn't play foot-

ball, he doesn't play sports.

"He just says 'Hey, this is just something I'm good at, why should I get a big head? Other kids are good at sports, and some are good at other things. This is just what I do.'"

In between dates, Bob Richter manages a feed store in Yoncalla, a town about 35 miles from Eugene.

He says that while most of Yoncalla's residents are country-western fans, friends and co-workers have been supportive of his second career.

When Bob and Wyatt appeared on Good Morning Oregon, "they all brought television sets to work. They've been real good about it," says Bob. "We (my employers) pretty much have an understanding that if I have a conflict between working with the band or working at the store, the music comes first."

A long-time observer and admirer of rock musicians, Richter got his chance to take the stage largely because of his son's talent. Her husband "went along on Wyatt's guitar lessons just to see what he was doing," Patti remembers.

"He had never picked up an instrument in his life."

It is plain to see that Richter enjoys sharing the stage with his son.

"It's a kick, especially playing with Wyatt," says Richter. "He



Playing a guitar almost as tall as he, Wyatt impresses a large WOW Hall crowd Saturday night

could go out and make a living at it right now. He's as good as a lot of them around, although he's not mature enough to do it yet. I'd say his future is unlimited.

"Our main goals are to keep doing what we're doing and polish up some songs. Like most musicians, we want to get a record out, and get on the radio to get well known."

Wyatt "has about 45 songs down" says his mother, including an original titled "Long Way to Go." He selects the music for performances. Loverboy is his favorite group.

Throughout the summer, the band had dates for all but three weekends, including B.J. Kelly's in Eugene and Sam McGee's in Roseburg.

When the band returns to B.J. Kelly's at the end of November, Wyatt will be playing on his favorite turf. "It's just the kind of place that I would like to be in," he says.

His mother suspects it might have something to do with the video games available.

Wyatt began playing the guitar when he was six years old, randomly strumming along with the music while listening to bands, such as Fleetwood Mac.

"He just liked the music," says Patti. "We took him to concerts with us, and of course the music we liked must have influenced him. He's literally been listening to rock music from the day he was born."

"When he was eight, he said 'I want to learn how to play this thing' so we started him out on lessons. He took them for about eight months and then stopped, and learned on his own."

"He's decided this is what he wants to do. He wants to be a rock 'n' roll star," says Patti, her voice straining to out-decibel the sound system. "We've got a seven-year-old girl that says she wants to play the cymbals. Whew. It's a good thing I like this kind of music."

Story by Sean Meyers

Photos by Scott Levy



All of 10 years old, Wyatt Richter belts out the lyrics of rock 'n' roll tunes like a pro.

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