

Chasing a Dream: A Conversation with Sara McMahon

*Local singer/
songwriter's career is
starting to take off*

By Scott Laird

Sara McMahon has been singing since she was a little girl. In high school she sang the National Anthem at several Vernonia Logger sporting events, and had the honor of performing it at her graduation ceremony. Now this singer/songwriter is hard at work trying to get noticed in the very competitive Portland music scene.

"To sing the National Anthem was always my dream when I was very young, but I was always terrified and didn't have the courage," said McMahon in a recent interview. "I first started performing it in local talent shows. After graduation I was asked to sing it at a couple of Monster Jam truck events at the Portland Moda Center, which was pretty crazy and awesome."

Recently McMahon has been playing with a band, and also as a solo performer. She has a regular weekly gig at the Rogue Tavern in North Plains, and has played numerous events around Vernonia, including what she called the highlight of her career so far, opening for a favorite band of hers, Root Jack, at The Birk in September. She has also been working on a recording in a small private studio, which she hopes to have ready for release in January 2019.

McMahon says she started teaching herself guitar about two years ago. "I was starting to write some songs and I thought it couldn't be too hard to learn a few cords on the



guitar. And the more I started to learn the more I wanted to work at it and get better, so I started spending an hour or two every day on my guitar playing."

With some guitar playing skills, a bunch of cover songs and a handful of original compositions, McMahon had to figure out how to find places where she could perform live in front of an audience. "When I was starting to expand my music, and I think it's something every musician goes through, I had to figure out the next step for myself."

For McMahon, that meant a lot of evenings, starting in the spring of 2017, hanging out and getting on stage at open mic performances around Port-

land. "I would take my guitar with me, go to work, hang around, and then go to an open mic about twice a week," explains McMahon. "I tried to hit all the different areas of Portland – St. Johns, Northeast, Southeast. Then I got my first real gig at the Vernonia Golf Course." And then things starting picking up.

In Vernonia she's returned to play several times at the Vernonia Golf Course, and has played at the Cedar Side Inn, at several fundraisers and private functions, at the Black Iron Grill during Jamboree, and at the Salmon Festival for the last two years. She also played at the North Plains Garlic Festival, at the Kramer Vineyards in Gaston, at the Hillsboro Farmers Market, and has played several times at The Pizzario in Hillsboro.

McMahon says she made a lot of connections during her time playing open mics, which helped lead to other opportunities. "It's been really good. There were a lot of people in the same boat as me, trying to figure it all out and find places to play."

When she got the regular, paying gig at the Rogue Tavern back in May, it was a bit of a surprise. "I had to pester the owner a bit just to get a chance, and then he had me come in and play a few songs," remembers McMahon. "And then he said, 'It's going to be every week for three hours,' and I wasn't quite

The Spirit of Christmas in Vernonia



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prepared for that, because I was just trying to get one gig. But I said 'Yes.' I'm finding that if I say yes to things that I might not be sure about, it usually works out pretty well." She's has been playing there every week since.

"It really has been so helpful to play at the Rogue every week, because it forces me to stay creative, practice, and learn new songs so I can change it up a bit each week," says McMahon.

She says she was recently invited to play at Tune-smith Night, a monthly showcase of original music by regional songwriters in La Grande this coming May.

McMahon says she has about 10 original songs that she's been performing regularly, mixed with covers by artists like Gillian Welch, Fleetwood Mac, Miranda Lambert, John Prine, and Sheryl Crow. "I have a notebook full of half songs, verses, and ideas. It goes back to when I was much younger

and I was always writing things down – poems, or just weird little things, or things I can include in a song I might be trying to write today. I never thought of myself as a writer, but now when I look back, I guess I was always writing. So now I have journals full. I usually write something down everyday, whether it's a page or just a sentence."

In this day of easy recording on smart phones and social media, McMahon has put some of her performances out for fans to listen to and view. The next step is getting a real recording done, which would feature some of her original songs.

"Wherever I play, people were always asking me if I had a CD, or something online they could listen to, and I didn't have anything like that. All the musicians I was around had a demo tape or an EP."

Getting time in a studio with a producer can be pretty

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Oregon to Update Driver License, ID Card Design

The next time you renew your Oregon driver license or identification card you may see a new design with new security features. DMV is rolling out a new card design starting this winter and early 2019.

The beauty of the new cards isn't just skin deep. The enhanced colorful look is part of the new card's advanced security features, making it harder to alter or duplicate.

Your current driver license or ID card will remain valid until its expiration date, so you do not need to replace your card before that date. You also do not need to replace your card when you move within Oregon – you can file your new address online at OregonDMV.com.

This is the first major upgrade to the card technology in Oregon since 2003. In addition to the new look and security features, the new card will

provide a vertical layout for provisional driver license holders – drivers younger than 21 years old. This will make it easier to identify minors where age restrictions apply, such as the purchase of alcohol.

The new card will hold the same information as the current card, including name, address, issuance date and expiration date, as well as a small duplicate "ghost" image of the person's photo. Driver license and ID card fees will remain the same with the new card.

New features

Among the new security features:

- The card body is a durable plastic material made of a polycarbonate blend.
- Customer information is laser-etched in clear, highly defined lines.
- The colors are printed in tiny patterns that are difficult to see without magnification and difficult to duplicate.
- The clear laminate covering the card

front shows a hologram of Oregon symbols at certain angles and light conditions.

DMV began to test and install the new card system in two Salem-area field offices December 17. After making sure the new process is working properly, DMV will begin to install it in the rest of its 60 field offices during the first half of 2019.

Real ID option in 2020

As a reminder, this new card design is not yet available as a Real ID Act-compliant card. Oregon will begin to offer an optional Real ID-compliant card in July 2020. Until that time, Oregon driver licenses and ID cards will continue to be accepted as identification at secure federal locations and for boarding commercial aircraft. For more information about Oregon and Real ID, visit http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/DMV/Pages/Real_ID.aspx.

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