

KeizerCommunity

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Celt beatboxer has freestyle flow and a growing legion of fans

By ERIC A. HOWALD
Of the Keizertimes

Tyrell Kennedy can make a beat you feel in your chest using only his mouth.

The McNary High School senior and beatboxer is a regular standout in area talent shows with a regular gig mimicking the drum beats using his mouth, lips, tongue and voice every Sunday at Salem's Barrel and Keg. But his journey from promising novice to budding star began at Houck Middle School.

"The summer after fifth grade, my brother was really pumped up to show me this stuff a guy named Rahzel was putting out. He was making this *Mortal Kombat* beat and launched into *Iron Man* (by Black Sabbath)," said Kennedy.

The performances inspired him to give it a shot and he spent the next nine months listening to mp3s, doing his best to mimic the sounds and then add in his own takes. Then he heard about a talent show being held the last day of his sixth grade year at Houck.

"I was all pumped up and I had my beats perfect, and then they told me there was auditions. After I heard that, I was freaking out because I had only ever performed for my family," Kennedy said.

He made it through with ease, and he spent three hours watching videos and trying to figure out how to hone his act the night before he was scheduled to take the stage. On his way out the door the next morning, he grabbed a large jug of water. The sounds he makes can take a toll on his vocal cords, and water provides lubrication.

"You have to have water that you drink before the show and during the show because you're sucking up a lot of air and dubstep actually hurts your throat because it's almost like holding a long growl," Kennedy said.

Throughout his day at school,



McNary High School senior Tyrell Kennedy drops a dubstep beat on an enthusiastic crowd at the McNary Talent Show in February.

people kept asking him what the water was for and, when he told them it was for beatboxing, few of his schoolmates believed him.

"They would tell me to perform and I wouldn't. Instead, I was practicing in the bathrooms all day long. Any free chance to practice, I took it," Kennedy said.

As his debut neared, Kennedy had a realization: he'd never actually been to an all-school assembly. He had no idea what one looked like or the number of people on-hand. When he took a peek inside the gym, his hands started shaking.

It wasn't until he saw the response students were having to

the other acts that he began to worry.

"I thought, 'What if that doesn't happen for me?'" Kennedy said.

When it was finally his turn, Kennedy was handed the mic and had another epiphany: he'd never performed with a mic. After some false starts, he pulled it up close to his lips.

"While I was doing it I put my finger on the side of my nose. Now I realize everyone thinks I'm picking my nose when I do this," Kennedy said.

He was more than nervous, he was putting himself on the line in front of his entire school, and all the girls he had crushes

on, in particular. His legs started shaking, but he closed his eyes and launched into his first beat.

"As soon as I started, everyone was cheering me on and wilding up and, when I stopped, I opened my eyes and everyone was still cheering. I'm blushing, there's girls screaming and I walk over to my spot and I get high fives and that's when I got over being scared. I was like, 'This is it. This is the start of me,'" Kennedy said.

After the talent show was over, kids were passing around yearbooks and Kennedy didn't have one to pass around for signatures. As he was quickly learning, he was good at improvisa-

tion. He pulled out a notebook and started having friends sign it. When the day was over, he had numerous notes encouraging him to keep going.

Since that first performance, Kennedy has gone on to stand out in the local beatboxing scene with wins in talent shows, music competitions and on-the-spot battling with other beatboxers.

After sixth grade, he and his family moved to Keizer and he transferred to Claggett Creek Middle School where he assumed he would know no one.

As it turned out, a few of his friends had also made the switch unbeknownst to him.

"That's when I started meeting new people because my friends were telling everybody else I could beatbox. I was friends with the AVID kids and they had connections to the teachers and I started performing for them, too," Kennedy said.

It was only a matter of time before he was performing at school dances, talent shows, assemblies and more.

"I was like, 'I'm going to love this school.' I had a lot more chances to get out there than I would have at Houck," Kennedy said.

Since making the leap to McNary, he's performed with the school's a capella group, Danger Tones, gone back to local elementary schools to perform for other students and has plans to work with a local jazz group and tap dancing studio.

"It's crazy when little kids are looking at me out in the community or parents even recognize me from performing at the schools or in coffee shops. It kind of freaks me out, I don't know them, but I'm really thankful. It gets me pumped up that people around Keizer and Salem know who I am," Kennedy said.

It was while traveling to McKay High School with a

contingent of the Celtic Val-ogram ensemble that he ended up in an impromptu battle with his cross-town rival, Charlie "Robotic" Torres.

Kennedy visited the same room where Torres was in class and the two battled on the spot.

"He does his beat and I do mine and suddenly everyone is freaking out. They wanted me to come to their school so they could see battles all the time," Kennedy said.

Kennedy ended up winning on Torres' home turf.

His most memorable battle thus far was with a local named Greg Williams. Williams was serving as a security guard at McNary and was showing off his skills to students when he challenged Kennedy to a duel.

Kennedy lost that first round, but the two ended up performing together last December at Barrel and Keg.

"I did my thing, closed my eyes and I did the beats he did then reversed them. I was making some of the craziest noises I'd ever made," Kennedy said. "He was amazed at how much I'd learned."

Kennedy has hopes of working in music production at some point after high school with hopes of going to community college then transferring to a four-year school. He's even entertaining the idea of becoming a teacher.

One of the things he enjoys most about beatboxing is sharing it with audiences and trading tips with other beatboxers. Even he and Torres share feedback on each other's work.

He still closes his eyes when he performs, but he's always listening for the crowd and their response.

"Once I start, everyone is going crazy and it gets better and better, and that's why I love it to this day," Kennedy said.

For videos of Kennedy performing, check out the Keizertimes on Facebook)

McNary class of '66: It's reunion time

The 50th year reunion of McNary High School's first graduating class has been set for July 15 to 17. The class numbered about 250 and were comprised of students who moved from North Salem High School and Keizer students.

The deadline for registering for the reunion of McNary's first graduating class is June 1. Visit www.mcnaryhs66.com for a full list of events for the three-day schedule and registration information.

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