

BECK VONTVER: WILD ABOUT MUSIC

BY JONATHAN KANE

Beck Vontver, a Wood River High School junior, is wild about music, which he proves by being able to play seven instruments—drums, piano, guitar, bass, trumpet, banjo and clarinet—proficiently.

As to his favorite, Vontver says it's a tie between piano and drums.

Vontver also likes to perform, playing with the high school's Jazz Band, Dixie Band and singing with the B-Tones. Further, he makes time to accompany musicals presented by St. Thomas Playhouse and Community School.

When asked about his passion for music, Vontver replied: "It's just really cool. It's all that I've done since I was a little kid.

"I think I started when I was less than 1 year old," he said. "My dad's a musician and he bought me a drum kit and I started playing that right away. He's a drummer, so he thought that would be the way to go. Maybe do a little 'Partridge Family' thing, but that didn't work out," he said with a laugh.

"My mom plays the clarinet, so today we all play jazz together. There is also a video of me on YouTube as a baby sucking on a pacifier to the beat of the music.

This past summer Vontver attended the prestigious Berklee Col-

lege of Music to study jazz piano.

"I got to play with a lot of great college guys and it was a pretty amazing experience," he said.

"I really love jazz. It's just hip, especially with the dark and smoky club scene. It's also a lot harder. You're still reading music but you add chord substitutions and do really crazy, crazy stuff."

Vontver said his musical influences on the drums are Elvin Jones, Art Blakey and Jo Jones. He also said he loved last year's movie "Whiplash" about the trials of a young jazz drummer.

"I really related to the kid, as would most young jazz players, and I agreed with the teacher's philosophy that being good is just not good enough."

As to piano influences, Vontver lists Thelonious Monk, Bill Evans and Gene Harris, who he calls "a crazy good blues guy."

"Evans revolutionized the world of voicing and the use of chords and Monk was just a total original," Vontver said. "Nobody could ever come up with what he came up with."

"But it all comes down to performing," he said.

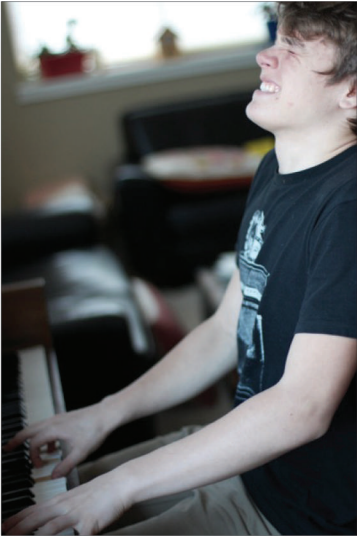
"I love it because you get to do a lot musically that you wouldn't otherwise get to do. In front of people, all your filters shut off and you don't want to be safe. You know the ma-

terial so well that you have revelations in the heat of the moment and do really amazing things."

In addition to being serious about music, Vontver is serious about his studies and currently has a 4.0 grade point average. His current course load includes Advanced Placement Psychology, Language and Composition, Chemistry, Algebra II, U.S. History and Video Productions.

He also finds time for sports, participating in football and wrestling.

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Courtesy photo

Wood River High School junior Beck Vontver tickles the ivories.

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