Singer-songwriter discusses Estacada's influence on her music

When asked how living in Estacada has influenced her music, singer-songwriter Jessie Leigh sums it up with one anecdote. A few years ago, Leigh got all dolled up for a bachelorette party, but when she climbed behind the wheel to drive to the event, there was a cow in the driveway.

“I’m all dressed up, out there wrangling a cow in my heels and I’m like ‘Okay, I’m officially country,’” Leigh said. “If you’re going to sing country, Estacada is a good place to come from.”

Listen to Leigh’s songs, especially “Country Girl,” and you’ll find a lot of Estacada sentiment.

Leigh grew up in Estacada, attended River Mill Elementary, Estacada Junior High and graduated from Estacada High School in 2006. She was Jessie Rickert back then, and later Jessie Elliot when she married her high school sweetheart, Joel, and took his last name. Jessie Leigh is her stage name.

Though Leigh enjoyed studying music in high school, she mostly set it aside as she attended Clackamas Community College and the Eastern Oregon University teacher education program on the Mt. Hood Community College campus and acquired her teaching degree.

For three years, Leigh taught in Estacada schools alternating as a substitute, kindergarten instructor and English Language Development educator.

Leigh admitted that at first teaching had seemed like a safer career path than being a musician. But she never lost her passion for music and continued to sing in church and at Bailey’s Pub & Grub (she was singing the night the original Estacada location of the establishment burned down).

In January, the Jessie Leigh Band had formed, with Leigh on lead vocals and acoustic guitar, Eric Benson on bass, Brendan Keith on keyboard, Michael Hensley on lead guitar and Mike Henke on drums.

With their mix of country rock originals and
In March, Leigh left her substitute teaching position to pursue music full-time and hasn't looked back. Fresh from gigs in California, Leigh said devoting herself to music is a dream come true. “The more I do it, the more fun it is,” she said. “Everything is falling into place.” Leigh penned the song “Burn Out the Lights” about “doing what you love until you can’t do it anymore.” The Jessie Leigh Band has enjoyed early success, diverse covers, the band had struck a lucky chord.
The Jessie Leigh Band is (from left) Eric Benson (bass), Brendan Keith (keyboard), Jessie Leigh (lead vocals and acoustic guitar), Michael Hensley (lead guitar) and Mike Henke (drums).

COURTESY OF KASIE VADER - The Jessie Leigh Band is (from left) Eric Benson (bass), Brendan Keith (keyboard), Jessie Leigh (lead vocals and acoustic guitar), Michael Hensley (lead guitar) and Mike Henke (drums).

ESTACADA NEWS PHOTO: ISABEL GAUTSCHI - Jessie Leigh, a lifelong Estacada resident, says the town has influenced her 'innocent country rocker' sound.

winning the 2015 Battle of the Bands at Ponderosa Lounge and earning a performance slot at the Oregon Jamboree at 11 a.m. Sunday, Aug. 2, in Sweet Home.

The band has a busy few months in store.

Though videos of live performances are available on the band’s website, the Jessie Leigh Band hopes to release a single this summer.

Leigh herself will soon head to Nashville for some studio time.

The band heads out on festival tours to Nevada and California in September and October, but you can catch the Jessie Leigh Band locally this summer.

The band is performing at 6 p.m. Friday, July 3, at the Estacada Timber Festival.

They also will perform at 3 p.m. Saturday, July 11, at the Sandy Mountain Festival.

More Online

For more information on the Jessie Leigh Band visit www.jessieleighmusic.com or find them on Facebook.

Timber Festival Music Lineup

Don’t miss the other incredible music acts performing at the Estacada Timber Festival Friday and Saturday, July 3-4 at Timber Park, 90878 N.W. Evergreen Way.

Pre-Show Concert Friday, July 3
6 p.m. Jessie Leigh Band
7:30 p.m. Calico
9:30 p.m. Brass Tacks

Tickets are $15. To learn more about the all-ages show and purchase tickets, click here.

Live music on Saturday, July 4

6:30 p.m. Strawberry Roan
8:30 p.m. Brass Tacks

Admission to the Timber Festival on Saturday, July 4, is $5 a person, ages 8 and under get in for free. Onsite parking is $10.

Find the full schedule of Timber Festival events at http://estacadatimberfestival.com/home/schedule/