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# Isaac Cole – On The Right Track

By: Hugh Shelton

Last November, 14-year-old Isaac Cole became the youngest recipient of the Inspirational Country Music Awards® New Artist of the Year. This faith-filled and talented young man is a perfect example of the next generation of Inspirational Country artists. Not only is his concert schedule usually filled with various churches, festivals, fairs, rodeos and a number of benefits, but Isaac has also received or been nominated for numerous industry awards, such as 2012 AMG New Artist of the Year, 2013 Agapefest Rising Star, ICGMA Male Horizon Artist and Song of the Year for "I'm Just A Kid," AMG Youth of the Year, Instrumentalist, Male Vocalist and Song of the Year for "I've Got A Home." Isaac's music is available on iTunes, Amazon and his website, and he can be followed on both Facebook and Twitter.

Turning 15 the middle of this month, Isaac is homeschooled in northwestern Pennsylvania and currently in the 8th grade. Although he gets "mostly As," he struggles with dyslexia, which makes learning much more challenging. Isaac spends his mornings with traditional academic subjects and afternoons with his favorite subject — Music! He reveals, "I take fiddle lessons, guitar lessons and voice lessons. I also work on writing songs, practice learning new songs and learning the Nashville number system." He is also putting together a music education presentation for elementary

and middle schools. He's excited that his first presentation will be with his local Boys & Girls Club! When not performing, true 'Country Boy' Isaac still spends part of his spare time riding ATVs. He has taken Judo (self-defense) classes the past 2 years and earned a yellow belt so far. He reports, "It's a lot of fun and great exercise." He also attends functions with his church youth group.

After receiving the ICM Awards® Youth in Music in 2012, Isaac started writing songs for his second CD project. He exclaims, "I found that I really enjoy recording my own music!" He spent time with fellow artists he admires, and they taught him how to write good songs. And, to expand

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his level of artistry, he started learning how to play new instruments and took lead guitar lessons. At this point, he comfortably plays four instruments in public. They include guitar, banjo, mandolin and fiddle. He says he's still working on the dobro, a

square-neck resonator. He admits, "Guitar has always been my favorite instrument, but learning lead guitar made it even cooler!"

When asked from which musician he has learned the most, Isaac replied that "this question takes a big answer!" After recognizing how blessed he's been by all the people God put in his life, Isaac starts listing them. First, he says, is "guitar teacher Steve Millison" who "taught me for

around 6 years." Then there was a band, ironically called In Transition, that he played with for a few years when he was 11-12. Isaac credits that band for teaching him "how to sing harmony." He has since learned about playing with a large band from bandleader Von McCommons. Isaac then credits fiddle teacher Joy Wilsted, who gave him "lots of music theory," and guitar teachers Brandon Shick and Roger Hoard. Another recent mentor is Richard Kiser for showing him "the Chet Atkins picking style." Long-time influence goes to Tommy Brandt, who has been a role model for Isaac since he was 5 years old. Isaac said that playing with Dennis Agajanian "is amazing," and knows Dennis has shown him "what it's like to





have a crazy tour schedule for 10 days." Isaac thanks "Dennis for the experience and showing me what it is like to sing and play for Jesus as a career." Not only is Isaac grateful, but he also realizes that what he's "learned from each of these people is forming who I am as an artist."

Before producing his current CD *Just A Kid*, Isaac wasn't really sure that he could write songs, but working with Steve Roberson, Von McCommons, Chuck Day and Tommy Brandt helped give him confidence; Isaac co-wrote all 5 songs on that project. Born liking Country music and a self-declared singing cowboy in kindergarten, Isaac says that all changed after meeting Tommy Brandt. Tommy has had a great influence on Isaac and has also produced both of his CDs. Mainstream Country artists like Brad Paisley and Keith Urban have Isaac's respect for their style and "level of musical ability." Isaac aspires, "When I take all of those influences and put them together, hopefully, that will be uniquely my style." Thanks to Dennis Agajanian, Isaac "had the great privilege of meeting Charlie Daniels last August in Pittsburgh." A huge Brad Paisley fan, Isaac knows that "it would be really cool to meet and work with him!"

Isaac draws his greatest spiritual guidance from the Bible, which his parents have taught him and taken him to church all his life. His homeschooling includes a Bible class, and he memorizes scripture daily. Isaac continues, "Mom & Dad use the Bible to teach me to live right." The one lesson that Isaac has learned up to this point in his life is that "honesty is the best policy." He explains, "Dad made sure I learned that lesson." Even as such a young man, Isaac admits to being excited in following God's plan. Not only is he appreciative of Salvation, "the greatest gift any of us can have," Isaac feels "very blessed by how God works out every detail in" his life. Isaac explains, "He meets my

needs, gave me a passion and ability for music and gave me the best mentors I could ask for."

When asked about performing regularly anywhere, Isaac responded, "Every Saturday that I don't have another obligation, I play in the First Union Methodist Church 'God's Country' band in Butler, Pennsylvania. My main instrument

with them is banjo, but I get to play my other instruments too." He adds that he also plays one Saturday a month at the historic Wheeling Jamboree in West Virginia, something he's been doing since last March. Isaac has also garnered a product endorsement from Gretsch Guitars, a time-honored, American-owned company with a long history of making high-quality, unique and affordable musical instruments. He admits, "It's an honor to know that such a great company has faith in me." He adds, "I'm sharing some of their history and some of their great instruments in the music education assemblies I'm working on." When it comes to his fans, Isaac exclaims, "Thank you, thank you, thank you!" He knows he can't thank them enough. Isaac expresses, "I know more than ever that this is what God made me to do."

An Inspirational Country Music Week® attendee since 2010, Isaac jokingly remarks that his initials are the same as ICM; he greatly admires that music and its many gifted artists. Isaac explains, "When you put God first in your life, everything will fall into place. Because God is first in the lives of so many great ICM artists, I've seen them persevere through challenges and remain loving, kind and forgiving." He continues, "A great example of this is my good friend Johnny Jones who has battled serious illness and continues to praise God with his music. He is a great inspiration to me." The best advice Isaac has for other young artists like him is "be friendly to everyone you meet and always listen to constructive criticism; it will make you a better person and performer."

How does Isaac envision his future? He plans, "In 5 years, I'll be freshly graduated from high school." He would "like to live closer to Nashville and pursue music full time. 10 years in the future is much more difficult for him to imagine. "I'd be 25, so I think I'll leave it up to God and just keep walking through the doors He opens for me." Isaac concludes, "It's been working pretty well so far!" From his continuing success and ongoing journey to become a "vital part of this industry," no one can deny that conclusion. **PS**



2014 ICM Awards® backstage photo  
by J. Scott Whigham