

San Jose's Jessica Johnson plays her city's jazz festival August 9

By HEATHER ZIMMERMAN

Talk about finding a calling: Jessica Johnson discovered her love of music at an age when most children are content to sing the alphabet. And she's had a song in heart ever since.

As a child, Johnson was fascinated by classic musicals she watched on her grandmother's TV, and a little more than a dozen years later, when she was 18, this

'I love singing all types of songs'
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up-and-coming vocalist began performing with her own band and making a splash with a classic R&B and jazz style.

Johnson, now 20, is making her third appearance at the San Jose Jazz Festival this year. She will be performing on Aug. 9, noon at the festival's R&B stage, on Almaden Avenue, north of Santa Clara Street in downtown San Jose.

Johnson, a Bay Area native and San Jose resident, attends San Jose State University, where she is majoring in music.

Johnson released her debut album in 2007 and is planning for another album, which will likely be released next year.

It all started when a very young Johnson happened to see the musical *Annie* on TV and was enthralled. Her enthusiasm for *Annie* spurred her grandmother to introduce her to a variety of classic movie musicals, from *Singin' in the Rain* to *Meet Me in St. Louis*. "I wouldn't watch a show unless it had singing and dancing in it," Johnson recalls.

Johnson took classes at a San Jose community center and by the age of 7, was taking dance lessons at Dance Arts Academy. Singing lessons quickly followed, and soon the young Johnson was performing at fairs and festivals, as well as competitions.

Though she performs in the jazz/R&B genre, Johnson says she is a music lover, and as such, her tastes are a little bit country, a little bit rock'n'roll, and more.



George Brooks' Summit, featuring Zakir Hussain, plays the jazz festival Aug. 10 at 2 pm.



Singer Jessica Johnson (left) will perform on the festival's R&B stage on Aug. 9, noon.

Among her many favorite artists are Rascal Flatts, Shania Twain, John Mayer, Beyoncé and Gladys Knight and young English soul singer Adele.

Johnson's diverse musical preferences often inform her performances. "I love singing in a jazz style, but I love singing all types of songs," she says. "So if you come to my shows, you'll see that I sing country, but I'll make it sound jazz. I'll sing different genres, but I'll make it my own style."

Johnson cites two artists in particular as influences. She credits the artistry of vocalist Eva Cassidy for drawing her to jazz. "She

was an amazing singer, the way that she interpreted the songs, you just feel it when you're listening to it," Johnson says. She also says that singer Michael Bublé has greatly inspired her by successfully reviving a more vintage musical style.

For her debut album, *Till It Happens to You*, released in April of last year, Johnson says that she chose among many favorite songs, literally making a list and arranging them in a way that tells a story. "I noticed that most of them were love songs," she says. "The order [of the album] is in the order of a love story."

During her performance at the jazz festival, Johnson says that she will perform some selections from her album, but also many new songs that she has been working on with arranger/pianist Tom Tomasello. In fact, the show may also include a song by country band Rascal Flatts.

"We arranged some new songs," Johnson says. "They're all covers, but every song we do, we arrange it and make it our own. I love to do a show where I get to sing new stuff where people haven't heard it."

Tickets are \$10 per day or \$25 for a three-day pass. For information, visit www.festival2008.sanjosejazz.org. For information about Jessica Johnson, visit www.jessicajohnsononline.com.