



Powered by Parker

Local band's lead singer thrives on music, family feel of Mid-Life Crisis

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photography by CLEM WEBB

JENNIFER PARKER HAS NO memory of the day she launched her singing career.

But to hear her mom tell it, when Jennifer was just three years old, the pint-sized powerhouse got up on stage with a band, grabbed a tambourine and started singing into the microphone.

"I honestly don't remember that at all," said Parker, laughing.

Parker has come a long way since stealing the stage from adults. Now the lead singer for the local phenomenon, Mid-Life Crisis, Parker would rather share the stage than steal it.

"Mid-Life Crisis is such a team, we're really a family," she said. "We all work together and we have a lot of fun. We depend on each other."

The band Mid-Life Crisis, an eight-member group, has been playing popular cover tunes to the booty-shakin' delight of audiences at area charity events, birthday parties, formal functions and coffeehouse gigs. They trade banter, jokes and good-natured barbs more like a group of lifelong friends instead of an eclectic mix of professions and personalities that got together somewhat by chance just five years ago.

"I was at a birthday party with Frank Oberle," said Mickey Sheffield, district judge by day, rhythm guitar, vocals and percussion by night. "And as the evening progressed, I just said, 'Let's jam.'"



Jam they did and Frank later suggested the two put together a band.

Almost six years and more than 135 gigs later, the band includes Parker on lead vocals, Antoine LeBlanc on the keyboard and vocals, Johnny Lindow on the saxophone, Frank Oberle on the drums, Doc Bradford on bass and vocals, David Perkins on lead guitar and Fred Swartz on vocals and guitar.

Not only did the band form by chance, but Parker joined by chance, as well. Her husband was having lunch with Frank Oberle, who is the Parkers' CPA, and another friend. Oberle mentioned his band needed a singer, preferably a woman.

"My husband knows better than to volunteer me for anything," Parker said. "And he didn't - our friend did!"

Parker went to a few practices with the band and played a few gigs with them in a very non-committal way. She was feeling out the band, they were auditioning her.

"Then they called me and asked me if I wanted to stay," she said. "And of course I did!"

Parker, who was raised in the Church of Christ, has little formal musical training.

"In the Church of Christ, all the music is a capella; there are no instruments," she explained. "I think I got some of my training from that."

Parker sang in the choir all through middle school and credits teacher Zane Bush with teaching her how to read music and stretch her vocal range.

Parker also used to perform in some of the Charlie Pruitt Country Music shows and sing at weddings.

"I do a lot by ear," she admitted. "I took keyboard lessons for a year and a half so I could take a sheet of music out and play it. It helped, but I still do more by ear."

Her ear has served the band well. They usually practice about three-hours each

week and average a couple of gigs per month. Parker limits her participation to about two gigs a month, as she is the mother to a nine-month old son and works full-time at Philpott Motors.

"The band is so wonderful and respectful of me having a family," she said. "They rehearse later so I can tuck my son into bed and then go to practice and they understand that my time with my child right now is the most important thing. I can always sing with the band, but time with my child is time I can never get back."

Parker also credits her husband, Ken, her mom, Jo Voss, her dad, Al Voss,

stepmother, Cindy Voss and sister, Sarah Voss with helping her balance life between motherhood, work and local stardom.

"I have a wonderful support system," she said.

Parker, who cut her teeth on country music, is challenged by the rock and roll flavor of Mid-Life Crisis.

"I was banned from country music for awhile to get the twang out of my voice," she said, laughing. Now, she loves to belt out Aretha Franklin, Gloria Gaynor, Etta James or Al Green and AC/DC. Mid-Life Crisis plays songs that get the crowds moving, including classics by the Rolling Stones and Beatles, ZZ Top, Patti LaBelle, and Credence Clearwater Revival.

The band has played everywhere from the main stage at Mardi Gras Southeast Texas to a private wedding on Avery Island. They played before the Foreigner concert at the Beaumont Civic Center and Parker even got to sing with Loverboy at one event. The band is a favorite at local non-profit events and donating their time is important to the members.

"This is a good way for us to give back," Shuffield said.

It's also important to the band to keep having fun together and making music.

"My plans are for us to stay together for as long as we can, keep playing and keep having fun," Parker said. **VIP**

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