

# ICING ON THE CAKE 14



For decades, music was the most important thing in Tara Scheyer's life. Then, she had a family.

The first time Tara and Kevin Scheyer's son Felix got a taste for performing was playing harmonica in front of about 800 people at a 12 Bands of Christmas concert at the Imperial Theatre.

He was three years old.

"So he walks out to me and he tripped and fell with a big slap... onstage," she remembers. "And I'm a mom, I'm not even thinking about playing guitar right then. I'm like, 'Okay, he's about to cry because that did hurt.' And he gets up, he looks out at the crowd and he just takes a bow. And I was like, 'This kid is better than me already.' He's a natural."

Felix's stage presence may have come as a shock to his mother, but it's not all that surprising to those who know his parents. His father is an award-winning girls soccer coach at the Academy of Richmond County who also has a long career as a drummer and percussionist.

"He has this incredible knack," Tara says of Kevin, to whom she has been married for 13 years. "He will pick up any instrument, and it doesn't matter if he's never touched it or played it before, and pretend to play and be silly and make it sound good. He will come down here all the time and bother me when I'm playing and he'll just pick up any instrument and start picking and it'll sound great. I don't know how he does it."

Felix, now 9 years old, has a younger brother in 3-year-old Nopa, and Tara said he's definitely the shyer of the two.

"He wants to be there, too," she says. "We played a show not long ago and he asked if he could play that harmonica part with Felix and I said sure. And he learned it and then he got up there and hid behind me. He has a whole different personality, so he may not be that interested in performing."

Music is definitely a family affair for the Scheyers, but it wasn't always that way. Tara, who moved to Augusta 19 years ago after closing her eyes, pointing to an atlas and driving where her finger led her ("I've told so many people and nobody believes me, but I swear it's the truth," she laughs), has a pretty long and successful career in music.

A native of tiny Union, Mississippi, Tara grew up playing piano in church and only moved away after receiving a scholarship to the prestigious Berklee College of Music in Boston. During school breaks, she

used a list she had made of places she wanted to visit and did just that.

"I realized I liked going to other cities, that it was fun, so I made a list of all the places I wanted to go and every break — spring break, summer break or even Christmas break — I would go to these places," she says. "Looking back on it, it just horrifies me as a mother because I just would go, not knowing anybody, and play and meet people and go sleep on their floor and wait tables. It was just the craziest thing and it was the best thing ever."

It was during these excursions that Tara, who was studying music education and piano performance at Berklee, began to branch out.

"You obviously can't take a piano everywhere, and it was hard even dragging a keyboard everywhere, so I started learning guitar," she explains. "I played other people's songs and then I realized, because I'm kind of shy and I'm not very articulate, maybe I should write out my thoughts. So I started writing songs."

So just that organically, a new facet of her career appeared, one in which she could make money writing songs. Right about the time she was supposed to graduate, she got signed to a record deal. So she changed her major to music industry, using the touring she did as the basis for a paper to complete her degree. Having gone through her list of places to visit, she moved to Augusta, where she stayed for two years and met her future husband.

Then she got a job in Nashville.

"I got hired by Reba McEntire's publishing company to write music for her, which I did for two years, and in the process they were helping develop me as an artist," she says. "So I got to do a lot of demos in her

studio."

Tara also wrote songs and dialogue for Reba's television show and the country star's publishing company helped Tara's own songs gain international popularity.

"And I still, to this day, I get checks, tiny checks, every quarter from a game show in Australia that uses a song of mine as some sort of song cue," she laughs.

Though Tara swears she doesn't deal well with 180-degree changes, her career took another turn when, after marrying Kevin in Nashville, the two decided to return to Augusta, where his family lived. They opened Fetch, a bakery and supply store geared toward pet owners in Surrey Center, and started the Mud Puppy Band.

"We decided we would focus on family friendly music, just because of the hours," she explains. "We could play shows in the afternoon at a library as opposed to at night and have to get a sitter. We started doing that and there was nobody doing that here, so immediately it just blew up. I was booked all the time. I hired a band, we put out two records right away and I got hired for every family friendly festival in the area."

"HiFi Felix," volumes 1 and 2, as well as the Christmas album "Felix Navidad," are available for purchase from tarascheyer.com. On all three, which contain a mix of adult songs like Johnny Cash's "I've Been Everywhere" and originals, Tara makes it a point to include the kids she teaches piano lessons to in the recordings.

"I always have all my kids, who I have down in the studio anyway, I have them record," she says. "I just get kids that I know to sing."

Her studio, lined with guitars and other instruments, thank you notes from parents and pictures from the hundreds of kids she's taught over the years, is in a basement that tends to flood. That doesn't stop her from teaching lessons, piano and ukulele camps, and her 16-member ukulele ensemble there, and her Silly Monkey and Baby Bear music classes have even outgrown the space and are now being held at GRU's Summerville campus this July.

Tara's summer is busy with these camps and classes, as well as preparing for the fall, when she'll teach music at Immaculate Conception School downtown,