

Calvin Napper practices on his drum kit.

Photo by Layla Farmer

# Napper lands dream gig

BY LAYLA FARMER  
THE CHRONICLE

City native Calvin Napper is traveling the country, playing the drums for R&B icons Maze featuring Frankie Beverly. One could say that it is the kind of gig that Napper has been preparing for all of his life.

Almost from birth, Napper has dreamed of being a professional musician.

"I started playing drums, I think at the age of three," he related. "All my aunts, they have stories of me coming to their house, beating up their pots and pans in the kitchen."

Be it nature or nurture, Napper was born into the right family. His mother and her four sisters were musicians themselves and members of the gospel group The Napper Singers.

"My family, they're all musical," said Napper. "I grew up playing with them."

He first graced the stage as a drummer around the age of 12, as part of his family's act, touring the country with his mother and aunts on the weekends. Napper, who is self-taught, says he understood then that drumming was more than a just a hobby.

"I pretty much knew that's what I wanted to do," he said of performing.

As a teen, Napper was a member of the basketball team and the jazz band at Reynolds High School. Two years after graduation, he landed his first gig with a major performing artist - gospel singer John P. Kee.

"It was an experience," Napper said of the grueling tour schedule, which included long road trips on uncomfortable buses and setting up his own equipment before each performance. "It was what I would call 'paying my dues.'"

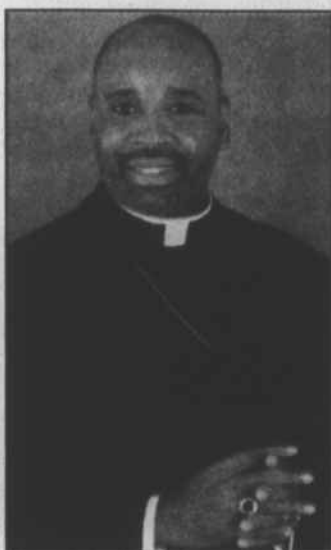
After two years of touring with Kee, Napper returned home and went back to performing at local venues. Bishop Sheldon McCarter, pastor of Greater Cleveland Avenue Christian Church, was looking for a drummer to complement the contemporary gospel sound he felt would attract younger members. He asked Napper to come on board, and, "the rest is history because it definitely works," the pastor said with a chuckle. The partnership has lasted nearly 17 years. McCarter, who has led the congregation for two decades, says the church is grateful for Napper's contributions.

"Music is essential in the African American perspective," McCarter declared. "Good music provides for good church. If the music is anointed and very moving, it makes preaching easy."

Napper, who says he often looks to McCarter for inspiration and guidance even when he's not at the church, says his faith has played an important role in his journey as a musician.

"Just being a Christian in general, you have to have faith to believe that you can actually achieve the things that you dream and desire to do," he said. "I think that's been the thing for me, being in a ministry where I'm being fed and can grow in the Word."

In addition to playing at



Bishop McCarter

Greater Cleveland, Napper joined the folk-rock band Last One Standing and spent several years performing in a variety of venues in the area, opening for such acts as Edwin McCain.

In 1996, Napper hit the road again, this time drumming for Donald Lawrence and the Tri City Singers. He worked with Lawrence until 2003 and continued to play at GCACC when he was in town.

Being out on the road and away from home is sometimes a challenge, but both Keve, an educator and Napper's wife of 10 years, and Bishop McCarter, have been understanding of the demands of his chosen profession, Napper said. McCarter said he has made it a point not to get in the way of Napper's opportunities outside the church.

"I'm very proud of who this young man is and what he is doing throughout the country," said McCarter. "He keeps himself very, very humble. I think he is an inspiration to many young musicians."

Making a living as a performer can be touch-and-go at times, Napper said.

"I think the biggest challenge of living this lifestyle is not really knowing what you have coming in from a financial standpoint," he commented.

Still, he couldn't imagine living any other way.

"Everybody's not cut out for the 9-5. I'm one of those people, so I've just had to try to really stay focused and grind and make this thing happen," Napper declared. "It hasn't been easy, but I love what I do, so I guess that kind of makes up for it, makes it easier."

In July 2004, Napper got an unexpected offer to travel to Europe with Donnie McClurkin.

"They called me maybe two or three days before they were leaving to go to London and asked me if I would be able to go," he related.

Napper even played on McClurkin's "Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs," which won a Grammy in 2005 for

Traditional Soul Gospel Album. After making the trip to Europe, Napper was asked back several times, and the relationship continued until 2008, when Napper began working with recording artist Stephanie Mills, who has worked in both the R&B and gospel genres. When Mills opened for soul act Maze featuring Frankie Beverly at Pier 6 Pavillion in Baltimore, Md. last summer, Napper caught Beverly's attention. He was invited to audition for a spot as the group's drummer.

It was the first time Napper had been asked to try out for a role. He watched videos of the group performing onstage, memorizing the strokes of the drummer in each show, then he headed to California, where the audition was held.

"I studied, I prayed, so from that point on, it was what it was," he stated.

Napper's hard work paid off, the audition was a success.

"He was really telling me how much he thought I could play and he really appreciated the lengths I went to (to prepare)," he said of Beverly. "They were just saying they felt like I was that piece that they were missing."

Since September, Napper has been on the road with the group, which does 85 to 100 shows a year. The work has been both demanding and rewarding, he said.

"Wow, it's been an experience; it's been great," related Napper, who has even released his own instructional DVD.

The group is contemplating a tour in Brazil in the near future, and Napper is hopeful they will make the trip. Getting to visit faraway lands is one of the greatest perks of his occupation, said Napper, who has played in destinations from Korea to South Africa.

"I never would have imagined that I would have traveled and gone to some of the places that I've gone to," he remarked. "You couldn't have told me that I'd be able to go to some of those places at someone else's expense and do what I love and get paid for it."

Though Napper says he enjoys all genres of music, his true love is contemporary jazz. He and fellow musician Vincent Crenshaw currently perform as the duo, "Destiny Brothers," and have recently released their first CD, "Smooove Avenue."

*Destiny Brothers will perform on Friday, March 18 at Boston's House of Jazz, 422 N. Edgeworth St. in Greensboro, at 9:30 p.m. For more information, call (336) 279-1152. For more information about Calvin Napper, visit [www.calvinnapper.com](http://www.calvinnapper.com).*

## News Clips

**Ernst named WSSU's assistant legal counsel**  
Joshua R. Ernst has recently joined the Office of Legal Affairs at Winston-Salem State University (WSSU) as an Assistant Legal Counsel.

Prior to coming to WSSU, Ernst worked as a temporary staff attorney at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts, where his practice primarily focused on the areas of policy development, employment law and intellectual property.

Ernst received his Juris Doctor from Wake Forest University School of Law, where he served as the Manuscripts Editor for the Wake Forest Intellectual Property Law Journal. He co-authored an article on the issues created by the courts' current disparaging trademarks jurisprudence, which was published in Spring 2010. Ernst graduated cum laude from Case Western Reserve University with a B.S.E. in electrical engineering, a B.A. in sociology and a minor in Russian.

### Schools receive nature grants

NC Beautiful has announced the winners of the 2011 Windows of Opportunity (WOO) Grants from The Duke Energy Foundation. Seven schools were awarded WOO Grants, which were created to cultivate an appreciation of natural environments by helping K-12 children get out of school and into natural settings. The grants also build leadership awareness, develop environmental education mentors and ambassadors, create materials and

resources that can be used by other students, and develop a sustainable outdoor program.

Stick Williams, SVP of EH&S and president of The Duke Energy Foundation, says that the Foundation has enjoyed a good and long-standing relationship with NC Beautiful and that reaching out to children now about the importance of environmental preservation is a sound investment for the future.

"Supporting environmental education in the classroom can excite the minds of many students to explore and pursue future careers in science," says Williams.

"The Foundation's contribution to NC Beautiful is an example of how one grant can become a catalyst for many to study and experience environmental education."

The Duke Energy Foundation 2011 Windows of Opportunity Grants recipients, including the name of the teacher submitting the winning entry, are: Kathleen Melious of T. Wingate Andrews High School in High Point; Jennifer Pegram of The Children's Center in Winston-Salem; Celeste Morehead of Marvin Ridge High School of Waxhaw; Ellen Mace of North Cove Elementary of Marion; Linda West of Jefferson Elementary of Winston-Salem; Rose Marie Cook of Greensboro Day School; and Janet Cain of E. Lawson Brown Middle School of Thomasville (Davidson County).

### Shepherd's Center to offer Spring Life-long Learning Series

The Spring Adventures in Learning education series sponsored by the Shepherd's Center will be held on Tuesdays and Thursdays, March 22, 24, 29 and 31 at St. Paul's Episcopal Church.

The series will begin with light refreshments from 8:30 a.m. - 9:15 a.m., followed by six morning course

selections, which include topics like "Writing Life Stories," "Art and Drama," "Financial Decisions," "Spiritual Discussion of Death and Dying" and "History of Religious Denominations in America."

The lunch and learn course option at 12 noon will be a discussion on American Foreign Policy based upon the Great Decisions Series at Wake Forest University.

Two afternoon sessions begin at 1:30 p.m. and include an Art in Sacred Places Tour and an Exercise Sampler featuring different forms of exercise for older adults.

The cost for the full series is \$15 for members and \$20 for non-members. Lunch is available for an additional fee. Call the Shepherd's Center at 336-748-0217 for more information or to register.

### Dick completes Air Force training

Air National Guard Airman 1st Class William B. Dick graduated from basic military training at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas.

The airman completed an intensive, eight-week program that included training in military discipline and studies, Air Force core values, physical fitness, and basic warfare principles and skills.

Airmen who complete basic training earn four credits toward an associate in applied science degree through the Community College of the Air Force.

He is the son of Jamie Dick and Bonnie Delar. Dick graduated in 2008 from West Forsyth High School.



Dick



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Attend an information session to learn if you qualify!

**MARCH 28, 6:30 P.M.:**  
Habitat Office  
(Spanish translation available at this meeting.)

**APRIL 1, NOON:**  
Habitat Office

**APRIL 11, 6:30 P.M.**  
Winston Lake YMCA

**April 20, 6:30 p.m.**  
Walkertown Public Library Branch



New Habitat homes as well as renovated existing homes are available.

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