



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER
THERON SANDY wants to get off the club circuit and onto the country music stage. He's hoping a record due out next month will help launch his career to new heights.

Theron Sandy's Betting Record Will Be His Ticket To Nashville

BY SUSAN USHER

On Dec. 6, 1982, Theron Sandy thought he was on his way, that his break had come. A friend had lined up an audition with a music figure in Nashville, at 50th Music Square. All he had to do was get there. Hitchhiking the entire 375 miles, the 26-year-old musician and songwriter arrived a day late.

"I finally got up with the dude but it didn't do any good," Sandy recalled. "So I just kept playing."

He's been doing a one-man show ever since, playing clubs all over the southern United States anywhere from two to five nights a week, and writing lyrics of his own on the side. A lot of that time was spent broke, pawning his guitar and other belongings to pay for gas and food between gigs and the pursuit of opportunities.

A native of Moore County, Sandy has been legally blind since he was 19, the result of a rare hereditary condition that affected two younger siblings when they reached 19 as well.

"I wouldn't be playing today if I hadn't lost my eyesight," he admits. "It was something for me to do."

"I've always liked country music ever since I've been listening," says Sandy, whose father was a country musician with a show in the early 1950s on Channel 6 in Wilmington. "I've never cared much for rock 'n' roll."

About the same time he moved to Brunswick County six or seven years ago, Sandy came off the road and quit playing for about three years, acquiring new equipment and caring for the three children in his custody from the first of two marriages that didn't work out.

The kids are teen-agers now, Crystal, 18; Theron II, 15; and Jason, 14, and Sandy thinks his next chance to make it to the big time is now.

With the backing of Aberdeen businessman John Davenport and possibly other individuals, he's about to cut his first record at a Tabor City studio.

"It's a long shot. I've been working 10 years for this. I've been striving for the big time," he said, looking back on a decade marked by serious cash shortages and good efforts gone awry, like the time he pawned his guitar to get to an Opryland audition. "What I've done I've done on my own, the hard way. I've paid my dues. I've slept in the alleys and drunk with the winos and I've been beat up bad."

But what he wants is to give up playing the clubs and bars that have been his home on the road and move to the concert stage.

"There are a lot of good people in the clubs, but it's not my way of life," he says. Once a drinker and a smoker, he's given up both and finds socializing with a club crowd difficult. "I play, take the money and leave."

"I don't like dealing with people. I'd rather be somewhere looking at a chickadee or something than be with a crowd of people."

Of the 50 or 60 songs he's written using his own life experiences for material, Sandy says he has about 15

that he considers worthy of recording.

His work has drawn a limited degree of attention: He won second place in the area 9th Country Showdown competition a few years back, has auditioned at Opryland and recently was chosen to make a video audition for *Be A Star*. In his notification letter producer Don Dashiell told Sandy he has a "unique vocal," though he said the show prefers "stronger material" than the two numbers on Sandy's audiotape, hinting at a different choice of material for the video.

But Sandy's sticking to the same two songs. After all, *Be A Star* doesn't accept patriotic or religious music and Sandy's first and possibly best-known piece, *Direct From Heaven*, crosses both genres. Local audiences heard the song at a county vigil for Operation Desert Storm warriors a year ago; it was also played for the soldiers in Saudi Arabia. It's the story of a dying soldier, who asks God's direct help in getting a last letter to his family.

Sandy's certain that song is the reason for his music. "If one woman came up to me and said, 'This letter was meant for me; I had a son who died in battle,' then I would be satisfied for my musical career to end, even for my life to end."

However, it is not this song, but the songs that made the videotape, *Late At Night* and *The Poker Machine*, that will appear on his 45 rpm record produced by Seaside, a subsidiary of Southern Sound Promotions, which will handle distribution and promotion when the record is released in early July. Sandy's waiting until he has the money to do it right to record *Direct From Heaven*, he says.

Late At Night is a ballad about love gone wrong, well-suited to Sandy's plaintive vocal style. *The Poker Machine* is a crossover piece about newfound love, a "little lady" dressed in white shorts and a white vest, spotted standing by the poker machine.

"He's a very talented individual, both in his voice and material," said Elson Stevens, owner and president of Seaside Recording Studios in Tabor City. "He's one of the best male vocalists I've worked with."

"What I expect is for it to go on the charts and hit the billboard," says Sandy, who believes in himself and his talent.

He's already making plans for a video, probably for *The Poker Machine*. When funding for that project comes through, he plans to use local people, ordinary people, he says.

"Most of the people who have ever helped me were people just like me. They didn't have anything and were just good old country people."

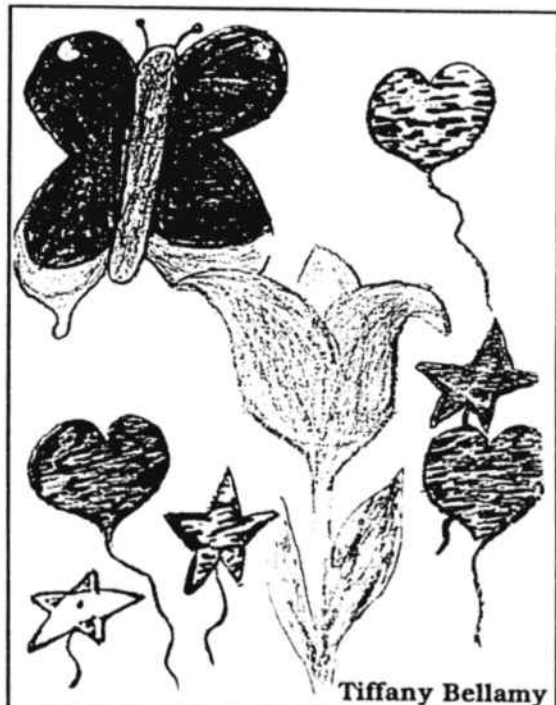
When Sandy tours those are the same kind of people he wants with him; good people looking for a break. But, he insists, the musicians traveling with him will be professionals when it comes to playing the music he loves.

THE KID'S PAGE SPRING Has Sprung

Written
by students of
Union Primary
School for everyone
to enjoy!

When I was an egg, it was dark. But I broke out. I began to eat. I ate so much I got fat. I turned into a silky brown thing. I stayed there for two weeks. I was a beautiful butterfly. I could fly high as a kite. I laid eggs and butterflies came again.

Chris Phelps



Tiffany Bellamy

Spring time is a very nice time. It is warm outside so we can play. I can also go to the beach.

Steven Burris

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Gena Best

Spring is here. The flowers are blooming. I can walk outside and see all the trees are showing green on the leaves. The grass is green. The bees are buzzing and the ocean is roaring. The days are getting hot and summer soon will be here. School soon will be out at the end of this year. Goodbye to spring cause summer is near. Goodbye to all my friends I had this year.

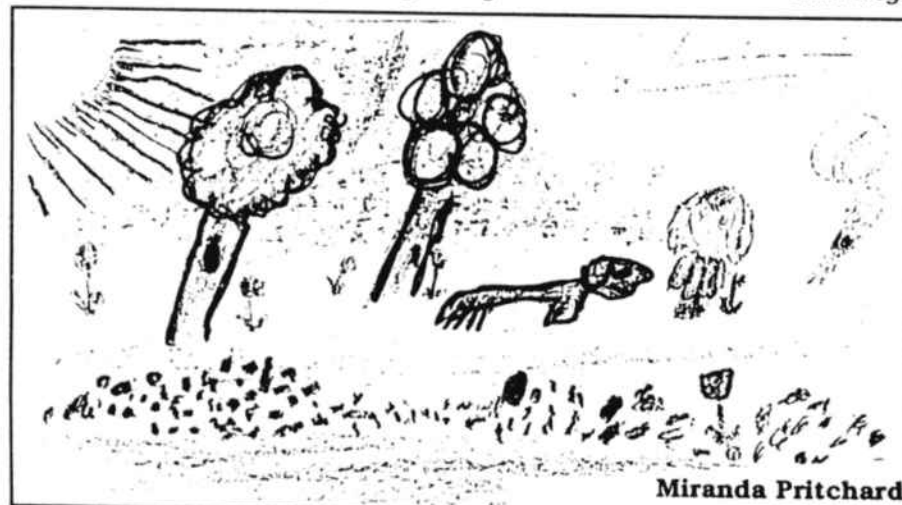
Valerie Terry

Once upon a time there lived a caterpillar and a tadpole. All the animals on land made fun of the caterpillar because he was so slow. All the animals in the sea made fun of the tadpole because he didn't have fins. The caterpillar and the tadpole were best friends. One day the caterpillar told the tadpole he wouldn't see him until spring. Soon it was spring. The caterpillar came to see the tadpole. They noticed that they looked different. Soon they realized they had turned into different animals! The tadpole was a frog and the caterpillar was a butterfly! Nobody ever made fun of them again.

Charitty Duran

It is spring. The flowers are blooming and the birds are singing. The grass is turning green. People are planting their gardens.

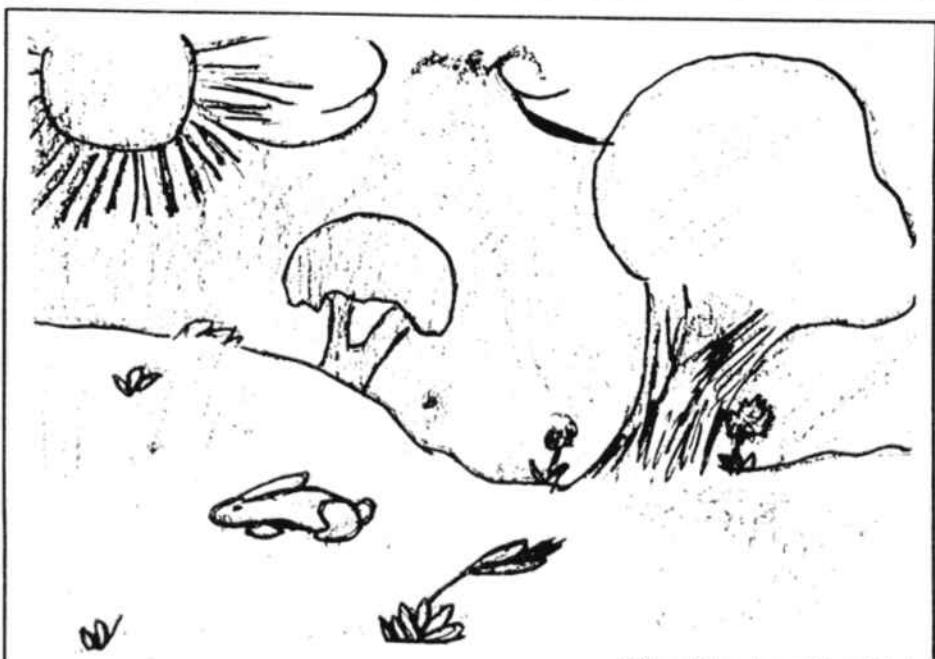
Chad Ivey



Miranda Pritchard

It is hard being an egg. I'm going to be in a cocoon. When I change into a butterfly I want to be pretty. I will be red, gold and blue.

Stuart Chamberlain



Timothy Armakovitch