

# Jessica Prouty Band

By Brian M. Owens

While most kids of this generation are playing Nintendo, texting friends on their Blackberry, or escaping reality on Facebook, singer-bassist Jessica Prouty and her bandmates guitarist Cody Nilsen, drummer Cam Pelkey and keyboardist Andy Covino are serious about making music. With two CDs to their credit and another one in the works, these talented teens have accomplished more musically than most players twice their age. I had a chance to talk to Jessica Prouty during her February vacation from school and she talked about her commitment to her band and their music...

**METRONOME: How old were you when you first got hit by the music bug?** Jessica Prouty: I've been singing in my church's children's choir ever since I was six, but I started getting in to rock music when I was around ten or eleven. That's also when I first started writing songs.

**METRONOME: So six years old was your first exposure to music and singing?** Yeah. When I was little, I used to watch Disney sing-a-long tapes. My grandmother thought it was a good idea to take me to the church music program for the children. She didn't think I would sing well considering no one in my family has any musical talent on her side of the family. It ended up that the church choir teacher approached my grandmother and said, "Wow, you have to bring your granddaughter to church on Sunday, she's the star of the choir." My grandmother almost dropped right then (laughs). She didn't realize that would happen.

**METRONOME: As a child, did you walk around singing and your grandmother heard you. What prompted her to bring you to the children's choir?** No actually. My dad plays guitar and sings. He used to play me Beatles' songs on his guitar and sing. I used to dance around, but I don't recall being a very vocal child.

**METRONOME: You said you started listening to rock music at age ten. How were you introduced to that?** A friend of mine, who is actually the current drummer of my band, Cam Pelkey, introduced me to a lot of heavy rock music. Everything from Slipknot to Slaven. My dad introduced me to classic rock around that time too, so I was listening to Led Zeppelin and AC/DC. I was listening to a lot of different varieties of rock around that time. That was also when my dad started teaching me guitar. **METRONOME: Did you meet Cam in school or is he one of your neighbors?** Yes, he's a school mate of mine. He's been a schoolmate of mine ever since the third grade. **METRONOME: When did you first put a band together?** This current band was established right before I went in to high school. We've been together for four years now. I had a band prior to this one that I had started in sixth grade for a school talent

show. **METRONOME: Were you twelve years old at that time?** Yes.

**METRONOME: Was Cam in that band with you?** Yes, he was.

**METRONOME: Who were the other people that played in that original band with you?** There was Greg Worth. He was the guitarist, but he doesn't really play much anymore. Katy Harvey was the bassist. She doesn't really play much anymore either.

**METRONOME: What instrument were you playing at the time?** I was playing rhythm guitar and I was singing. **METRONOME: What was the name of the band?** Undecided Youth was the name of the band.

**METRONOME: Did you start your own band when Undecided Youth broke up?** Yes. There was a lot of internal conflict and personal decisions that didn't suit others. I quit that band during the winter of 7th grade. At that point I was a little depressed because the people in the band were like my brothers and sisters. Even Cam and I were not friendly towards each other. There was about a year or so of me not doing so well in school and not doing so well friend-wise. Then my parents stepped in and helped me and put me in a Monday Night Garage Band program in Lynn, Massachusetts with my current producer as the instructor, Brian Maes.

**METRONOME: What was that program called?** It was just called Monday Night Garage Band. We prepared over the summer. Every Monday night, Brian would have a practice over at his house. After about eight weeks or so, we had a concert at the Boston Street Grille.

**METRONOME: Was the year you were feeling depressed because you weren't playing music?** It was middle school. I had lost some friends and it was the whole deal about not being with my bandmates. I had written a lot of songs during that period of time, but I wasn't playing them. A lot of those songs were on the Jessica Prouty Band's first CD.

**METRONOME: Was there a moment in time when you decided, I need to put a band together and start playing again?** Yeah. What happened there was, during the Monday Night Garage program, Brian had listened to some of my original work with my old band. We had some home recordings of the songs. He said, "Those are really good.



Photo Credit: Tyler Healey

Would you want to go in to the studio and record some of those songs and make a CD?" I was so excited because I had never recorded a CD before professionally let alone my music. I had written all of those songs myself other than a couple that were with Cam and Greg. I asked both of them permission to record the songs and they both said, "Yes." I also offered them to come in and record their parts. Greg said, "No," but Cam said, "Yes." Cam ended up recording the drums for almost every song on the album.

**METRONOME: So you and Cam are the original members of the group?** Yes.

**METRONOME: What made you switch to bass guitar?** During the end of Undecided Youth, the bassist stopped showing up to practices. We needed a bass player and I had a bass at home that my dad had. I started picking it up and playing. I fell in love with it. It was more out of necessity that I started playing it, but after that, I enjoyed it much better than the guitar, so I've kept up with it. In the Monday Night Garage Band, I played bass and sang as well.

**METRONOME: How did you meet your guitarist, Cody Nilsen and keyboardist, Andy Covino?** During the recording of the first CD, we had a lot of session players come in to record parts. Kook Lawry played guitar. He recorded several parts for the first CD. Tim Archibald went in and re-

corded the bass because at that point he could play my bass lines much better than I could. He added a lot more accents to the songs. At that point I thought about it and said, This is awesome, but what happens when we play live? I wanted my own band again like I had before. I met Andy Covino, my keyboardist from that Monday Night Garage Band program. I asked him to come in and listen to the music and see if he would want to be a part of it. He said, "Yes." Then we were looking for a guitarist. I asked Kook, Who is your best student that is my age that you think could be in a band and really pull it off? He suggested Cody Nilsen. That's how the band came together.

**METRONOME: What year did you release your debut CD?** 2007. It had nine tracks.

**METRONOME: Did you finalize your band shortly after that so you could play out live?** Yeah.

**METRONOME: So the four of you have been together since 2007?** Yes.

**METRONOME: That's a good long time for any band.** Yeah. We've seen a lot of bands that have risen up and, especially when it comes to college, break apart.

**METRONOME: You have just released a new CD called Time To Escape. Tell me about that.** Yes. It's a shorter length CD. It only has five songs on it. That CD really focuses more on the band as a whole. On this CD there is a track called "Summertime" that was written by Cody. He wrote the bulk of that song and sings it. "Please Be Okay" was a song written by me for a friend of mine. "Escape" and "Falling" were written by the band as a whole. This is more of a transitional CD where we are working together and writing together. We have new material coming out where we are all writing together. It's a lot of fun. The other track on the CD, "Light" was written by Brian [Maes]. He wanted us to have the song. He said, "I think this would be a good fit for you guys."

**METRONOME: You said "Escape" and "Falling" are group collaboratives as far as the writing. How does the process work for the band?** Usually we have a focus whether the song be fast or slow, heavy or soft. These two songs, in particular are a little more heavier. I'll usually bring in a set of lyrics and that will usually be the base for it. Then Cody will start coming up with guitar riffs. Cam will take a look at the lyrics and start figuring out something on the drums. Andy will do the same with his keyboard. They help me with lyrics sometimes too. Cody is a rhyming machine (laughs). I usually sing or hum something and Cody will pick it up like that. He's a great musician.

**METRONOME: When you sit down to write lyrics, how do you accompany yourself? With a guitar? A bass?** Yes, with a guitar.

**METRONOME: Your voice really stands out on the new album. Did the singing come easy for you in the studio, or did you have to work at it?** For this album we did more takes because we didn't want to use autotune and all that. For the first CD I just let things go, but for the second CD a lot of the songs, especially "Escape," I had sung in my 'head voice' and Brian suggested, "Why don't you sing that in your chest voice for the recording and see how you like it?" Personally, I was having a few pitch issues while singing in my 'head voice.' It was a real challenge for me, but I think it came out great. I'm so happy. Now I can sing that song in two seconds if you ask me to.

**METRONOME: What made you go out to SpiritHouse Studio in Northampton to record?** We had heard about the studio and had taken a look at it. It was amazing. Brian's studio is great, but it's a home studio, where, SpiritHouse is a professional recording studio. They have a lot more microphones, recording equipment and a house engineer to help you. We brought Angelo Caputo who is a sound engineer and Marc Adams with us.

**METRONOME: How did Paul McNamara fit in to the picture?** He was so kind to us. Everyone at SpiritHouse were wonderful. If we needed help with anything, they were right there. They even went to the point of having our meals ready for us. The space was gorgeous. They even had a hot tub...

**METRONOME: How did you find SpiritHouse?** Brian found it for us.

**METRONOME: How many sessions did you book?** We had two sessions there that were a little spread apart. One was three days straight. We got almost no sleep. We wanted to compress the time as much as possible. The other session was two or three days total.

**METRONOME: Did they have sleeping accommodations for the band?** Yes, they did.

**METRONOME: Why didn't Brian [Maes] engineer the project?** I'm not sure, but I know he was really adamant about doing the producing. He handled a lot of the management work in the studio.

**METRONOME: Who owns SpiritHouse?** Paul McNamara and Dan Bernini.

**METRONOME: How long did it take you to record Time To Escape?** The actual recording process took a long time. We wanted to make sure the songs were perfect. Maybe about 65 hours.

**METRONOME: Once all the tracks were laid down, was the entire band in the studio for the mixing process?** Yes (laughs).

**METRONOME: Cam and Andy are credited on the album for "yells." How did the yelling come about?** Cam is a fan of a lot of hardcore music. There's a lot more screaming and yelling. In rock music there's a lot of group chants and that's something that Cody, Cam and Andy really advocated for. During the song "Escape" there are a couple of parts where there is a group chant in the background. Marc should also be credited for that too. I was also there.

**METRONOME: What kind of bass guitar are you playing these days?** I'm playing a Schecter Diamond Series Elite 4 bass. It's not as big as a Fender bass and not as heavy either. **METRONOME: Have you had a CD release party for Time To Escape?** We haven't had an official release. For the first release we had a party at The Hard Rock. For this CD we literally got it out before our summer tour. There was really no time to plan for a CD release party. I consider our past summer's tour our CD release party. We got so many CDs to people. It was awesome.

**METRONOME: How many shows did you play last summer?** At least forty.

**METRONOME: Any shows of note that you want to talk about?** Last year we opened for Southside Johnny & The Asbury Jukes at the Maine Lobster Festival up in Rockland, Maine. It was awesome. It was so much fun.

**METRONOME: Are you working on any new material?** We are actually going to the studio this week to record at least one more song, "The Calm Before The Storm." We hope to put out another CD at the end of this Spring in anticipation for one of our bigger shows that's coming up in June. We're going to be going to Maryland to play in front of 12,000 people. We're going to be playing with Travis Pastrana in the Nitro Circus Tour for the Agape Children's Connection. The program connects orphanages in southern India with churches in the states that helps support the kids in India. Travis Pastrana rides motorcycles free style, and has won X games numerous times in motocross, supercross, free style and rally racing. We're going to be playing right underneath motorcycles going over our heads.

**METRONOME: How did you meet Travis?** He's my cousin.

**METRONOME: How many songs do you have planned for the new CD?** Eight or nine songs. We're recording at Brian's studio for this one.

**METRONOME: What are your plans for the future?** Are you all going off to college? My definite plan is for the band to stick together. Cody and I will both be attending Berklee College of Music. Cam is not quite sure what he's going to do, and Andy still has two more years of high school.

**METRONOME: What will be your major at Berklee?** I wrote on my

application that I wanted to be a Professional Music major. Everything from performance to the music business. It's going to be exciting.

**METRONOME: Who are some of your musical influences, past and present?** I like The Beatles, but I also have a lot more modern influences. Led Zeppelin is another rock band that I really fall for. I really like the band Evanesence and newer bands like Crossfade, Shine Down, Saving Abel and Diary of a Deadman.

**METRONOME: Where can people learn more about you and the band?** Stay posted at [www.jessicaprouty.com](http://www.jessicaprouty.com) for all of our upcoming shows. We're really excited for this upcoming summer. It's going to be a big one. Stay tuned, we'll be all over New England.

by Brian M. Owens