

By Jimmy Tomlin
STAFF WRITER

He's just a toddler, but already, 2-year-old Julian Davis marches to the beat of a different drum - literally.

A typical toddler pretends he's a drummer by grabbing a wooden spoon and a worn pot from Mommy's cupboard, then banging out a loud, erratic beat that could curdle blood.

Meanwhile, Julian doesn't have to pretend at all. The tiny tyke looks very much at home behind his miniature drum set, a drumstick in either hand. His mop of black hair bounces freely as he feels the music, pounding out a steady, textured groove, in perfect rhythm, moving deftly from snare to bass to cymbals.

"He plays polyrhythms, which means playing more than one rhythm at a time," says Norman Allred, who, with his wife Lisa, has legal custody of Julian. "He's also doing syncopation."

If it sounds as if Norman knows more about drumming than most folks, you're right. He has played professionally for more than 20 years - including stints with The Catalinas and The Part Time Party Time Band - and he teaches private lessons through Campbell Music.

But before you go accusing

Norman of being a "drummer dad" - forcing the boy to follow in his musical footsteps - you should know that nobody tells Julian to practice on his drums 30 to 45 minutes a day. He does it on his own. And if he'd rather play with his toy cars and motorcycles or go outside and play catch or do any other "normal boy stuff," as Norman calls it, he's perfectly free to do so.

Having said that, though, even if Norman and Lisa aren't steering Julian toward a drummer's life, the High Point couple readily acknowledge that he appears to be

headed in that direction.

"Oh, he's definitely gonna be a little prodigy musically," Lisa says.

A few weeks ago, Julian made his public debut, performing to "Let Us Pray," by contemporary Christian artist Steven Curtis Chapman, during services at the family's church, First Wesleyan.

He's been asked to perform again during the upcoming Christmas Eve service, when he'll play - appropriately - "The Little Drummer Boy."

"What amazes me about him is his natural ability and his natural rhythm," says Starr Cromer, interim choir director at First Wesleyan, who first heard Julian play during a practice session with the choir.

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Julian was about 10 months old when he began banging on tables and chairs as if they were drums, and by 14 months he was sitting behind a drum set and demonstrating his natural flair for playing, Lisa says.

"The day we gave him his new drum set, he stayed on that thing for, like, an hour," she says. "I remember thinking, 'That's not like a normal child.' Most kids would bang around on it for a couple of minutes and then go on to something else."

Julian, who will turn 3 next



Norman Allred instructs 2-year-old son Julian

month, clearly benefits from Norman's drumming skills - but it's not a blood connection because he's not Norman's biological son. The Allreds became Julian's legal guardians when he was 3½ months old; he had been living in an unstable family situation prior to that.

They were granted protective custody when Julian was 5 months old, legal custody when he was 11 months old, and now they're in the process of trying to formally adopt him.

"As far as the birth mother knows, there's nobody in either family who has extraordinary musical talent, which makes a good case for environment versus heredity," Lisa says. "There could be some heredity involved, but I don't think his talent would have been fostered in him had he not been living in our home."

Norman, who began playing drums when he was 6, agrees.

"He's really too young to know how to do sticking patterns or read music, but he emulates me real well," Norman says. "He'll sit and

watch me, and then do what I'm doing. He changes tempos. He knows where the stops and starts go. He listens to the music. Those are things that show he's really got some natural ability."

Norman has begun to show Julian some basic techniques, "but it's still mainly him emulating what I do," he says.

Norman reiterates that he's trying not to force Julian into playing the drums.

"He'll get up in the morning before he goes to day care and play his drums on his own," Norman says.

"And he's always been that way. When he was real young, if we gave him the sticks, it was all we could do to get him to stop playing because he would just cry like crazy."

Cromer, the choir director, says Julian's talent at such a young age is a strong indicator of his potential.

"He's extremely talented," she says, "and getting started this early there's no limit to where he can go with his playing."

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