

## The Beginning (Round 2)

I have ALWAYS dreamt of recording a full length album, but never had the opportunity to do so... Until spring of 2015. On a whim, I entered Hard Rock Cafe's Hard Rock Rising contest. I'd done it a few years before and had fun, so I figured why not? I never imagined I'd be here when I submitted, though!

If you're unfamiliar with the competition, it's essentially a Battle of the Bands hosted by Hard Rock Cafe. Bands and musicians submit to their local Cafe (mine was Niagara Falls, as I lived in Rochester, NY at the time). Fans then get to vote for their favorites, and the top choices compete live. There were 3 weeks of semi-finals, then the winners of each week competed in a final round. From there, winners from each Cafe around the world go head to head for a chance at the grand prize - a performance in Barcelona plus TONS of other sweet perks.

As NOT a band (i.e. a solo act) going into a Battle of the Bands, I didn't have high hopes - I just wanted to enjoy it. So you can imagine my surprise when they announced me a semi-final winner. Along with returning to the finals, I won 5 hours of recording time with Mark Custom Studios. Talking to the judges afterwards, I was told I needed to bring my very best next week - and I'm thinking to myself, "Shit! I already brought my best!" I went home thinking of ways to up the ante, and did the one thing I know how to do... I wrote a song.

I wanted to play something that embraced my unique style, hit home with the Hard Rock audience, and showed the judges I could do everything a band could do. I ended up writing "I Know What You're Thinking" which unfortunately, is not on Here's to My. The best part of the song is performing it live, and I didn't want to lose that magic by recording it. It was sassy, it forced people to clap along, and there was even a line about bringing a piano to a Hard Rock show.

The other bands (both in the semi-finals and the finals) were amazing. I don't know how the judges did it, because everyone was SO GOOD. But when they announced my name as the winner... DAMN! The place went crazy. I've never experienced anything quite like it. I was called up on stage, did multiple interviews, had pictures taken for what seemed like forever... I was even handed a giant check for \$1,000. PLUS 5 more hours of recording time! It felt like a dream.

I didn't go on to win regionally, nationally or worldwide, but I'm kind of glad. Who knows what I would be doing right now if I'd gone to Barcelona, but I'm guessing it wouldn't be releasing my first album. Oh, and a special shout out to Justin and the entire Niagara Falls Hard Rock Cafe crew for being so awesome. The start to this almost 2 year long journey wouldn't have kicked as much ass without you!