



## Destin's sax man plays the 'City Beat'

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With a passion for music and a deep love for rhythm and blues/soul and jazz, Destin's saxman, Michael J Thomas, is living and pursuing his dream, a dream to perform his music and use his God-given talent.

But now he says he is pursuing it in the right way.

"I have surrounded myself with music industry professionals who specialize in smooth jazz," Thomas told The Log. "If you want to be successful, you have to surround yourself with successful people in the same field and learn from them. There are no exact formulas for creating a clear-cut path to where you want to be, but you should have a general paradigm to work within that is flexible with the changes of business over time."

Thomas, born in 1978 in Cecilia, Ky., a small town outside Elizabethtown, began playing the saxophone at the age of 12 at West Hardin Middle School in Kentucky.

He wanted to play the drums, but realizing that was not an option, he was drawn to the saxophone — because of its unique shape — and after many long hours of practice and dedication, his abilities soon became obvious to everyone. He won numerous talent shows, made All-State Jazz Band and was awarded the John Philips Sousa Award in his senior year of high school. Thomas also received a music scholarship to the University of Kentucky where he attended for two semesters.

But his love was performing, and Thomas' career began at the age of 19 when he toured with a band named Jive Rockets. He also opened for a variety of known acts, including Brian Setzer Orchestra, Big Bad Voo Doo Daddy and Bill Haley's Original Comets.

In 1999, Thomas moved to the Emerald Coast, where he has performed at local

establishments, festivals, concerts and private venues. He has shared the stage at the Seabreeze Jazz Festival with stars including Dave Koz, Richard Elliott, Peter White, Joyce Cooling and many others. In 2006, Thomas was named Best of the Emerald Coast in the Best Musician/Vocalist Band category.

Thomas can play all types of music, but his favorite music is smooth jazz/funk/soul music.

“I grew up listening to artists like Prince, Michael Jackson, Stevie Wonder, and Ohio Players,” he said. “In my teens, I discovered saxophonists such as David Sanborn, Dave Koz and Warren Hill and found out that these guys are playing music with the urban sounds that I love. There is something about these musical styles that resonate within my soul.”

### **‘City Beat’**

After a lot of hard work, beginning with songwriting in March 2008, Thomas will release his debut soul-jazz album, “City Beat,” on March 2. The inspiration for the overall theme of “City Beat” came from his love of visiting major cities, such as New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles and Bangkok, Thailand.

“I love visiting places where there are a lot of things to do and places to visit,” he said. “It is exciting for me because I’m from a small town and live in a small town now, except in the summer when it feels like a big town with all the traffic. The tune, ‘Midtown Manhattan,’ reminds me of my trip to the Big Apple. I remember walking out of the subway onto Times Square at night and it was so bright because of all of the lights. It might sound funny, but that was entertainment for me. I was in such awe.”

Thomas’ approach to writing music takes many different forms.

“I often write by simply picking up my horn and playing, banging out some chords on a piano, or a melody will just come to me without even trying,” he said. “My favorite, of course, is when it just pops into my head without effort.”

On “City Beat,” Shannon Wallace joined Thomas in co-writing many of the songs.

“That was tons of fun because Shannon adds his personality and creativity to the mix and the results of our collaboration are ‘City Beat,’ ‘Wedding Song (Forever Always),’ ‘30-A Degrees,’ ‘Mind Your Step,’ ‘Back Home’ and ‘Cali Trippin’.”

But the music retains Thomas’ own flavor of smooth jazz.

“Most of my music cannot be compared to other artists out there,” he said. “I concentrate on melody. To me the melodies and groove of a song are more

important than prolonged solos over a chord structure and overplaying.”

Thomas has two favorite songs on the album. One is “City Beat,” but Thomas thinks that most musicians will dig “Mind Your Step.”

“It’s very different from the norm,” he said. “The title came from my trips to Thailand. Most of their signs are translated into English. Every time there is a sign where you need to watch your step, the signs read ‘Mind Your Step.’ I found some humor in it and that’s where the title came from.”

The only song on the album that Thomas did not write is a familiar one to many — Michael Jackson’s “Billie Jean.”

“I was a huge Michael Jackson fan growing up and still am,” Thomas said. “There are some embarrassing videos of me as a kid trying to dance like him and lip-syncing to his music. I’m grateful my mom doesn’t know how to use the computer very well, so you won’t be seeing that on YouTube anytime soon. I wanted to do a strong cover song of Michael’s and knew the most popular and obvious song would be ‘Billie Jean.’ Little did we know that months after recording it, Michael would have such an untimely death. I don’t think we will ever see another artist quite like him. Even jazz musicians respected him and that is not typical for a pop artist to gain that kind of respect.”

Thomas is grateful to be working with some of the top people in his genre.

“My radio promoters work with the biggest names in smooth jazz, including artists such as Dave Koz, Mindi Abair, Richard Elliot, and even some artists that are not smooth jazz such as Michael McDonald and Rod Stewart. This is my first CD to ever be promoted on the national level — in some instances, internationally — and so far things are going very well.”

The single, “City Beat,” debuted at no. 35 on the Indiestar.com chart and was in the top 10 of most added singles and most spins at [www.SmoothJazz.com](http://www.SmoothJazz.com). Radio stations across the nation are adding the single every week. The CD was also serviced to the local smooth jazz station, 106.3 The Seabreeze.

“My hopes are that things will continue to go well with the album and that I can perform at various jazz festivals in the U.S. and internationally with the talented musicians who performed on the album,” Thomas said. “It takes time to build a name, but I’m confident that I can make a splash. I’m not looking for superstardom like a pop star, but I would like to be a recognized name in smooth jazz. I’m looking forward to the day when my radio promoters tell me that XM Radio, The Dave Koz Radio Show, or The Kenny G Radio Show are playing ‘City Beat.’ That would be very exciting and I think I would feel a real sense of accomplishment.”

The new CD can be purchased after its release date on March 2 at [www.MichaelJThomas.net](http://www.MichaelJThomas.net) and [CD Baby.com](http://CD Baby.com). It is also available in digital form at [www.michaeljthomas.net](http://www.michaeljthomas.net), iTunes and [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com). To hear music from the CD and see a video of "City Beat", visit his Web site.

## **Local**

Thomas says the uniqueness of the album is that it was produced, performed and recorded by local talent on the Emerald Coast.

"I hand-selected the musicians that I knew could pull off an album of this caliber starting with Shannon Wallace, whom I've always admired and respected," Thomas said. "I needed musicians who could play with the precision, heart, and soulfulness it takes to produce a quality album with the goal of it being larger than just another homegrown CD. I needed a product that could compete with anything on smooth jazz radio and these guys delivered. Without Diki Ross on keys, Eric Lampley on bass, Jonathan Davis on drums, Paul Scurto on trumpet, and Mr. Shannon Wallace on guitar, this album would not be the success that it is and will become. The only part of this album that was not handled locally was the mastering. We had it mastered at Lurssen Mastering in Los Angeles by Reuben Cohen. They have mastered albums for Dave Koz, Snoop Dogg, the 'Slumdog Millionaire' soundtrack, etc. It was the icing on the cake."

Outside the studio, Thomas is grateful to his parents and his wife who have always supported him and encouraged him to continue his music career.

"Last, I would like to thank my financial backer, God, for continuing to bless me. Without His blessing, the finances to put this album together would not be possible."