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Miramonte Grad Plans His Future in Music

By Andrea A. Firth



Carter Soso Photo provided

Carter Soso was with his father attending a reception for incoming freshmen at the University of Miami Frost School of Music when he got the news. Soso had realized his dream. He had been accepted to the Frost School of Music, his first choice, one of the top contemporary music programs in the country. Now his mother was on the phone saying that a letter had arrived informing him that he had received a faculty-recommended scholarship from the school. "Frost is such a draw for me. To get a scholarship is just amazing. It made me feel that they really wanted me," says Soso.

It has been a good spring season for the 18-year-old Soso, a recent graduate of Miramonte High School. His college acceptance and scholarship came on the heels of an award from the YoungArts Foundation. Soso was an Honorable Mention Award Winner in the category of Popular Voice. Chosen from more than 5,000 applicants in the visual and performing arts, Soso was one of just 174 Honorable Mention honorees for YoungArts this year.

Soso's interest in music started with a heavy metal garage band. He was in sixth grade and played bass. "I was a metal head back then listening to bands like Metallica and Megadeth," says Soso. From there he picked up the electric

guitar and taught himself to play Led Zeppelin's rock anthem Stairway to Heaven. By eighth grade Soso's musical taste had shifted left to contemporary pop/rock and reggae, and he was listening to singer-songwriters like John Mayer and Jack Johnson. Mastering the acoustic guitar soon followed.

Like many young people in Lamorinda, Soso spent a lot of time in the pool and swimming was his primary focus when he entered high school. He swam on the varsity team his freshman and sophomore years, but he had also joined the choir. Something just clicked at that point, says Soso, and he knew that music was his real passion. His Speedo was retired; he became a member of the Chamber Choir; and he landed primary roles in the Miramonte musical productions.

"Carter has always had a tremendous ability to focus intently on what interests him most," says his mother Catherine. Her son nods in agreement, "I can spend hours and hours playing the guitar and composing."

Channeling his focus has not always come easily, acknowledges Soso who speaks openly about dealing with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), a diagnosis he received early in grade school. "As a kid I was very distractible," says Soso with a smile and a shake of his head. Soso takes a very pragmatic approach to the ADHD diagnosis and continually works to understand and manage his behavior. Over time he feels that his distractibility has lessened and his interests have expanded.

Today, Soso is an accomplished musician-singer-songwriter with a long list of original songs ranging from contemporary to reggae with some electronica mixed in filling the hard drive of his Mac. "The ukulele is my favorite instrument right now, and I love performing with a band." Soso sings lead vocals, plays guitar, and writes original music for the reggae band Herbivores. "I really like writing reggae. The music sends a good message."

Soso's musical talent may have some connection to his DNA. His grandfather played violin and sang as part of the big band scene in the '40s and '50s. "He's in his nineties now, and he has seen me perform," says Soso adding, "He's excited to see that I can follow my passion into college and get a degree in music." When Soso starts at the University of Miami in the fall, he will major in Composition and Commercial Music and Production. "Ideally I would like to continue performing my own music, and I think it will be great to learn about the commercial applications of music for television and radio and to produce music for others too," says Soso.

You can check out Carter Soso's music on YouTube. A couple of this writer's favorites are: Ukalazy-an upbeat ukulele tune with playful lyrics; Sunday Evenings-electronica evocative of that feeling at the end of the week; and Smoke and Mirrors-Soso on acoustic guitar sounding very John Mayer-esque. Find links in the online version at www.lamorindaweekly.com.

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