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Musician not fixated on fame

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Kent Smedley's new solo CD *Whispered Dreams* doesn't fit into a tidy description.

Smedley says the lyrics and scores he composed for all the original songs are "acoustic, sort of Dan Fogerty style, and the vocals fit '80s hard rock." A careful listen will also reveal classical, Spanish and occasional heavy metal tones.

The popular guitarist, whose studio is in Mandarin and who lives in Arlington, formed his playing and teaching styles from a wide range of influences. At age 4, he says, he began playing the guitar under the supervision of his father, an accomplished trumpet player. As he grew older, Smedley said he studied classical guitar under several teachers, including the legendary Jack Peterson, founder of the guitar programs at Berklee music college in Boston, and the University of North Texas.

In 1988, Smedley founded the hard rock band Prodigy, and after the group's first album was released, Prodigy opened shows for Megadeth, Pantera, Yngwie Malmsteen and many others. In 1990, Prodigy received the top award for heavy metal bands from Jam magazine.

Smedley says the band suffered "internal tensions" and split up. Smedley went on to record with Kitae, and played in bands like Manic Expression and Spicoli's Dream. When he wasn't creating his own music or performing, he was teaching.

Smedley has taught more than 1,000 students. Terry Balsamo, guitarist for Cold and Evanescence, and James MacDonough, former Megadeth bassist, are among those he instructed.

At this point in his career, he says, "I got frustrated with the band situation." A solo album seemed like a good fit for his goals.

Guitarist and singer Kent Smedley performs at the House of Jam on St. Augustine Road. He plays during lunch every Wednesday. KAY DAY/Staff

"This way, I can make sure it's done the way I want it. I had the material and I thought it would be fun."

At a recent performance at House of Jam on St. Augustine Road, Smedley demonstrated his versatility. Songs like *Take It Easy* by the Eagles reflect a well-trained voice and expert guitar picking.

On the *Whispered Dreams*, Smedley takes his guitar to a new level. Before the *Fall from Grace*, for example, features intricate chords and picking in a complex score, while *The Lives We Touch* rests on yet another unique and complex combination of chords and notes, with the gentle feel of a lullaby.

Smedley's music career is demanding, but a big priority is family life at his Arlington residence. He's the father of two daughters, one a musician and the other a visual artist. His wife, whom he honors with the track *Amy's Song* on *Whispered Dreams*, often brings the girls to various arts events.

The composer and performer says fame isn't his end goal with music.

"If I got famous, so be it," he says. "I just want to keep doing the music. I would like a lot of people to

hear my music, because of messages in it that might help a lot of people."

He says he wants listeners to realize there's always somebody out there that can help -- "whether it's family, or God -- it's more to get a message across." He says he's already working on the next CD, and as he composed *Whispered Dreams*, "I felt like somebody was giving the songs to me."

Smedley's teaching time is in great demand; students often must wait for a spot to open at his Mandarin studio at Music World.

Smedley plays a regular gig, doing lunch every Wednesday from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the House of Jam. Smedley sometimes plays a weekend night there, and fellow musician and friend Jim Koopman, known as "Jammin' Jim," will join him, playing the flute with a vigorous approach that makes a big sound. One recent Friday evening, Koopman joined Smedley for several songs, and their performance of *Scarborough Fair* drew heavy applause.

As Smedley prepared to perform *She's Always a Woman* by Billy Joel, he said, "It's gotta' be in the hardest key for an acoustic guitar." He played the song as it was written, in E flat. Any guitarist knows the level of skill required for that feat. Kent Smedley was more than equal to the task.