



Detroit toddler taps into drumming talent

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By Emilia Askari

Gannett News Service

"Go, baby!" Bernie Pavone of Bloomfield Hills, Mich., yells.

His son, 21-month-old Julian Pavone, grins and bangs his drumsticks against the snare in front of his high chair, then he twists and pings a cymbal or two before turning back to the DW drum set and whaling away as he sucks his pacifier.

After a quick session, he peeks up at his mother, aunt, cousin and grandmother, who are sitting on steps watching the impromptu concert. They clap admiringly.

"See," says his grandmother, Gloria Tactac of Bloomfield Hills, "he's looking at the audience like, 'Come on, give me some love.' The kid loves an audience."

Julian has played before some big audiences lately. A couple weeks ago, he premiered before about 30,000 fans of the Cleveland Cavaliers, getting a standing ovation for his 2-minute improvisation during the fourth-quarter break. A Detroit TV station broadcast live from his house on one recent night.



Julian Pavone, 21 months, plays the drums at home in Bloomfield Hills, Mich., earlier this month. Julian's father, Bernie, has his recording company preparing a CD of the toddler playing. (Gannett News Service/Richard Lee)

Julian's drumsticks fly joyously as he attacks his large, professional-looking drum set, his toy drums, a coffee table.

But as to whether he's truly a prodigy drummer as his father and family friends proudly claim, at least one expert expressed reservations.

"A prodigy is someone who's playing at an elite level at an abnormally young age," says Kendra Whitlock, director of pops and specials for the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. "It's not just banging around and keeping time."

Julian is still a toddler who sometimes throws his sticks on the ground and doesn't want to play.

Still, Whitlock acknowledged that many kids less than 2 years old would have trouble holding drumsticks.

Julian's father's recording company is preparing a CD of the toddler playing, called "Go, Baby!"

Bernie Pavone, 40, says he discovered Julian's interest in drums when his son was 3 months old.

Julian was in a harness on his father's lap as Bernie Pavone played. Julian grabbed the sticks and took a turn.

Julian now is at the drums half an hour to two hours a day, not all in one stretch. Famed jazz bassist Ralph Armstrong of Detroit was impressed.

"He's a genius," said Armstrong, who initially was skeptical when Bernie Pavone, an old acquaintance, called and asked him to listen to his son play.

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