



👉 *On the record with*

## STEVE RIVERS

**With the holidays on the horizon, 24-year-old performing artist and songwriter Steve Rivers is looking forward to returning to the place where he started before gearing up for a big year. That place is Campbellville, Ontario, home of his parent's Nassagaweya Vet Lab, which services the local harness racing community. Rivers, whose major musical influences come from the country, rock, blues, and Americana genres, released his independent debut album *Beginnings Of A Work In Progress* in 2008 and dove right into the music industry by venturing out on his own to the country-rock city of Nashville, Tennessee. He now has a new CD in the works, which is expected to be released in early 2012.**

Interview **Brittney Mayotte**

Photographs **Jesse Rashotte Photography (live performance) & Doug Vosler (portrait)**

### HOW DID YOU AND YOUR FAMILY GET INVOLVED IN HARNESS RACING?

Well, my family and I got involved in harness racing first and foremost because we are big fans of the sport. Harness racing is a big part of our lives and community, which was probably the biggest factor that influenced my parents, Costas and Nancy Demetrious, to start the Nassagaweya Vet Lab in 1998. They own the blood-testing laboratory in Campbellville, and through the use of hospital-grade medical

analyzers we can determine various factors that influence a horse's performance during a race or training (sickness, muscle tie-ups, infections, iron levels, etc.). I like to think of my dad as the horse "mechanic" and the lab as the "garage." Clients bring in a couple vials of blood and we try and pin-point if there is a problem in the "engine" or in the "wheels." My father has also helped set up equine labs and hospitals in other horse racing areas such as Kentucky, New Jersey, and Florida.

### DOES YOUR FAMILY OWN HORSES?

My family has owned about 20 racehorses in the last 10 to 15 years – maybe one or two a year.

### CAN YOU RECALL SOME OF YOUR EARLIEST EXPERIENCES WITH MUSIC?

My dad got an offer for a job in Saudi Arabia when we were younger working with an American and Canadian company so we lived there for about five or six years until 1995 and I went to an American private school. There wasn't any current pop radio. I grew up with my dad's old records like the Beatles, which I think gave me a good foundation for my music. I think my first preschool was at an American Army base and one of the soldiers' wives taught piano lessons on the property and that's how I got started – learning piano with her weekly when I was five years old. I ended up getting a chance to play at the American Embassy.

### WHEN DID YOU DECIDE TO PURSUE A CAREER IN MUSIC?

I knew I wanted to do something with music since I was a kid, but I think I was finally set on it near the end of high school. My band at the time gained a lot of popularity in our hometown and surrounding area and our songs were getting amazing feedback from people. I realized that my songs started to mean something to people and I wanted to make a living out of writing and performing them.

### WHAT STEPS DID YOU TAKE TO GET STARTED IN THAT DIRECTION?

There's a reason why they call it music "business." Like any industry you have to know it inside and out. Doing music for a living is just like starting any other form of business; you're an entrepreneur in a very tough and cut-throat industry. So I went to college in London, Ontario, and studied music industry in one of the hardest programs to get into. I was lucky to be accepted and I learned a lot in those few years. It was also during that time that my professors sent me to Nashville. They said, "Your songs are good, but they could be better!" Nashville is where you go to learn how to write. I remember sitting in Ralph Murphy's office (the VP of the American Society of Compos-

ers, Authors and Publishers) in 2008 and getting my songs ripped to pieces. It was an eye opening and humbling experience and it showed me where the bar was. And I am truly thankful for that because it made me step up my game.

### CAN YOU RECALL YOUR FIRST LIVE PERFORMANCE?

I remember my first real "paid" gig was at this little community hall in Milton, Ontario. My band and I got hired to play at a fundraiser for the men's soccer club. We were maybe 16. I think we had two to three songs that were original. We played a lot of covers from bands like the Beatles, Eagles, Rolling Stones, Tom Petty – all the classics that we idolized.

### HAVE YOU PERFORMED AT ANY OF THE RACETRACKS?

Yes! Mohawk Racetrack used to have this great Sunday night concert series in the summer and one year we were hired to play. It was my first year performing as a country/rock solo artist. I had a great group of players with me and we had a ton of fun. I remember it was the day after I spent the weekend at Wasaga Beach and my entire body was sun burnt. The guitar strap over my shoulder was causing me so much pain, but I managed to get through it pretty good.

### WHAT OPPORTUNITIES HAVE MOVING TO NASHVILLE GIVEN YOU?

Nashville is a city with a small-town atmosphere so everybody knows everybody. It's great because there's a real community feel amongst songwriters and musicians. I've made so many friends here over the last few years, which have opened some big doors for me. I've had opportunities to write with some major hit songwriters, work in some great studios, and received an artist development and management deal. I've also had opportunities to write with other upcoming artists that led me to get my first cut on Amanda Nagurney's newest album "Gone." She recorded a song called "You Can Make It On Your Own," which we co-wrote together.

### WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO CHANGE YOUR NAME FROM STEVEN DEMETRIOUS TO STEVE RIVERS?

Well Demetrious isn't the easiest name to pronounce or spell or fit on a marquee, and in the age of fast information and online networking you need a brand name that's memorable, quick, and relatable. The name Rivers resonated with me when I was in Memphis starting at the Mississippi River and thinking what an amazing historical body of water it was. It might be one of the most important factors that led to the spread of blues/southern-folk from New Orleans all the way to Chicago (and beyond). My last name wasn't really carrying me anywhere – maybe I just needed a new river to sail on. Does that sound lame?

### WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST CAREER HIGHLIGHT SO FAR?

Hearing my song *The Place Where I Started* on the radio for the first time. That's the biggest hurdle to jump over. They played it in Owen Sound at a couple of radio stations and at a couple of stations overseas.

### HOW HAS YOUR MUSIC DEVELOPED FROM YOUR FIRST INDEPENDENT RECORD TO YOUR UPCOMING NEW RELEASE?

I think there's a different maturity level between these two records both musically and lyrically. I've spent a lot of time writing songs that are true and relatable. I released my first record in '08 when I was 19 and since then I've re-written this new album from scratch about five times. In Nashville, the motto is "it's all about a song" and the best song wins. An album is like a team of songs and if one isn't up to par and is dragging the album down then that song gets put on the bench.

### DO YOU HAVE ANY PERFORMANCES SCHEDULED FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON?

I have a few more shows here in Nashville before the end of the year, but as far as playing any "Christmas" shows I don't have any. I'm looking forward to winding down for the holidays; 2012 is on track to be a big year!



## A BIT MORE...

**Favourite Sunday football snack?**  
Chili (my own recipe!)

**Football team you cheer loudest for?**  
New England Patriots. Tom Brady is just a phenomenal player!

**Best American beer on tap?**  
Yuengling Lager!

**Most memorable road trip you have taken?**  
Driving through the southern U.S. in 10 days in the spring of 2010 with three of my best friends.

**Favourite Christmas movie?**  
Home Alone

**What is on your Christmas wish list?**  
Socks, an iPod, and a record deal

**Favourite Christmas song?**  
"God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen"

**Favourite song on your new CD?**  
My favourite song so far is *When The Time Is Right*

**What is the most overplayed song on your iPod?**  
Eric Church *Sinners Like Me*