

A Brief and Tangled History of Simone & The Supercats
by Rae Botsford, for LiveByMedia.com

Note: This is the unedited version of the article, as the LiveByMedia website is currently down.

Ten years ago Simone Star, leading lady for genre-hopping rock band Simone & The Supercats, was writing her first solo album as a folk singer. Detroit native Simone had previously been part of Punch N Kitty (no relation to the 'cats) and Teknotika (who enjoyed touring the EDM scene in Europe), but in 1999 she found herself in Florida, essentially alone and out of the industry until 2003. "I was just doing open mic nights," says Simone, "just moving from one state to another and I didn't really know any people, besides family. I took up the guitar more so because back in Detroit I was a lead singer, and I didn't need to play an instrument or anything, but when I moved here I started off with getting a guitar and just kind of playing around at home with it. The more confidence I got, I decided to go to open mic nights to meet local musicians, kind of check out the scene."

That same year, the Supercats were just declaring themselves a band. "The whole thing behind the Supercats is it's a big family," says Bryan Kezer, keyboardist and sometimes-bass player of Simone & The Supercats. On the romance side of things he's also Simone's life partner, and he's the sole member of the band who's been there since the beginning, but he's humble about his situation. He knows that the Supercats would not be what they are without his various former bandmates and without all of Simone's personal musical history.

And Simone did not meet the Supercats right away. At that time, seasoned musician Billy Van Riper was giving her lessons at [Guitar Haven](#), and she had huge opportunity for mentorship. "I met a lot of master musicians who really inspired me and helped me out with my first CD, called *On My Way*," says Simone. Without a steady band behind her vocals, she hired various mercenary talents to give life to her songs, and *On My Way* was quietly released in 2004 as the hurricane season overran her plans for a release party.

She followed that album with *Talk to the Rose* in 2006 and though she hired studio musicians, she was more on her own in creating it. Yet after that CD she found she was seeking people who could help her develop as an artist. "I felt I wanted that influence," she says. That's when she met Bryan at an acoustic jam. His performance style impressed her, so she gave him her CDs and told him she wanted to work with him. The resulting album, *Temporary Heaven*, marked a new season for Simone. This was the first time she really desired to work collaboratively on an album from initial idea to final release, and working with someone invested in the project is a very different gig from just using hired guns for the recording. According to Bryan, the great value of *Temporary Heaven* was that "it taught her that she's not always right."

It was then that she was ready to ditch the "girl on the corner folk singer" reputation and pick up something edgier. She left the scene for about a year while she honed and re-branded. "Even vocal style, I had to work on that too," she says. "Being able to hear my voice in a more aggressive tone was something that I never really did before, even with my dance music." She returned in force in 2009 with the rock album *Built to Last*. They toured up the I-10 corridor and trekked to Austin every month, revealing the new Simone.

Bryan was still with the Supercats but Simone hadn't joined them, yet she was very specific about wanting a band behind her. Thus, they shopped for temporary musicians to get her to Austin on a regular basis. After a year and something like twenty-seven ephemeral bandmates they finally started to

lock down drummer Solomon Randelman and guitarist Andy Cartmell. They put out *Supercats Christmas* and *Acoustic Live*, followed by a punkier CD called *Tabitha Rides the Shark* under the guise of Gorillaz-esque fictional punk band Tabby and the Tabtones (you can see some of that [here](#)). Today Solomon and Andy, while still part of the family, are no longer with the band. Solomon brought them their current drummer, Sam England, and the end of this year marks the Supercats' first anniversary as a trio. Despite all their major changes, in both lineup and genre, the group seems to grow unceasingly in popularity.

Simone & The Supercats might be the highest paid band in Brevard County, but they have bigger dreams than that. They're ready to write a brand-new album and hit the road again. "While it's been a blessing to make a living doing music, it's time for us to now get a new album completed and tour that album." Touring is particularly expensive for an indie group and their tours are all self-funded, so cover gigs along the way help slow the bleeding. At this point they've secured a number of sponsors for equipment, gear, and merchandise. "It's allowed us to be a completely self-sufficient organization," says Bryan. They can now manufacture whatever they need, according to Bryan, and should they want a twenty-four-hour recording marathon they have the freedom to tough it out in their very own studio. "Part of the reason was to become more independent," confirms Simone.

When asked about their trajectory from here, the Supercats hedge. "Some of the long-term goals that we have are gonna be intentionally ambiguous," says Bryan cryptically. "There are some things we've been developing that aren't ready for public consumption yet. Suffice to say, our end game does not involve Brevard County for an infinite period of time." It turns out that Simone already has a fanbase in Jakarta and the Phillipines, and they've both toured Europe. "When I was doing Technotika," remembers Simone, "the dance music was underground here but more mainstream in Europe so you had companies who were willing to buy your ticket and fly you over there." Unfortunately this is no longer the case, and it's a cost-prohibitive journey for an indie band in a day where Internet-based music will do. So for now, Europe will have to wait.

Is there an album in progress? "Yes," says Simone. "We are writing. We are currently writing." With some coaxing, they admit their process has changed again. Simone, Bryan, and Sam will all be writing down their own ideas separately, for music and lyrics, and then they will come together and knead the best parts into something beautiful. Says Simone, "My intention is inspiration, and through my inspiration hopefully inspiring others with the music that I write." They did craft their punk song "She's a Drag" specifically for a contest (which they won, by the way — check out the video [here](#)), but typically, they just write what they want. "Every day, we're writing something. Even if we're not putting it down, we're creating," says Bryan. With a laugh he adds, "Most of it's crap."

So wait, what kind of band is Simone & The Supercats? There's not a simple answer. "We did the punk thing, we did the modern rock thing, and I'm just writing," says Simone. "I can't put it into a bubble. Creativity, you can't lock that down as far as put it in a box." They write what they want out of a deep-seated need for authenticity, but they also recognize the need to make a living. "Should we develop songs that are the flavor of the day and virally market it and hope for a payoff?" asks Bryan. "Or should we continue to reinvest and redouble our efforts to our core belief system and look for more longterm growth?" Simone adds, "It's easy to get jaded when you have to play cover music all the time as far as being an independent artist to make a living," but she also enjoys her freedom to skip the desk job. "Struggling is good," says Simone. "It gives you experience, it gives you appreciation. It's called paying your dues; I appreciate all the dues that I've paid. I've paid a lot of dues. Yet I think that all the experiences I've had are gonna make me, and have made me, stronger for when I go and tour again. I'll have a different perception this time."

At the very least Simone doesn't think that being a woman, or being biracial, has made the music business harder for her. Her mother was a good example of a strong woman, and Simone cites that as a possible reason for her own confidence. Constantly touring with all men isn't always fun, but she spins it positively: "There's definitely a difference between the male and the female, which is great, we all have our gifts." Her real problem is an invisible one. "I'm the type of person who could just be a monk," she says, and the modern world does not jive well with the part of her that wants to run off into the wilderness. "My greatest struggle, as an artist, as a human being, as a female, is my spirituality," declares Simone. "I'll write lyrics and it's just like frickin' cosmic lyrics I'm writing and I struggle, well, is anybody really gonna care about this? Is anybody gonna care about everything meaning nothing and nothing meaning everything? Or do I write pop-y lyrics, where it's like 'I love you, you love me, let's have a baby'?"

Reflecting, she adds, "*This* is who I am, out of all the things I'm telling you."

Check www.simonesongs.com for Simone & The Supercats news, media, calendar, and more. Totally into them and want to buy a CD? Grab one at their [online store](#).

Discography (as given by Simone):

On My Way 2004

Talk To The Rose 2006

Temporary Heaven 2007

Built To Last 2009

Supercats Christmas 2010

Acoustic Live 2010

Tabitha Rides The Shark EP 2011

Supercats Spring EP Sampler 2012

Supercats Greatest Hits 2012