Level of entertainment hits new high for festival

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BY JESSICA SIBLEY
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WESTMINSTER — The level of musical talent at this year's South Carolina Apple Festival is unmatched, and any organizer of the event will tell you that.



James Amber is the lead guitarist for the Shawn James Band and has performed across the United States and Canada.

Packed with nationally known recording artists, up-and-coming youthful performers and a wide array of jamming genres, a fresh sound will resonate from around every corner of historic downtown Westminster during the upcoming event.

Part of what makes this year so special has to do with the young talent taking the stage.

According to Ray Burroughs of Joyful Noise Entertainment Group, the artists include Ella Mae Bowen, 15, of Walhalla, Jaycie Ward, 13 of Beech Island, SC, 12-year McKayla Reece of Canton, NC, 10-year-old Olivia Gettys of Gainesville, Ga., CiCi Jansen, 14, of Charlotte, NC and Kendall Moore, 16, of Piedmont, SC.

Ward, Reece, Jansen and Moore are past winners of the Country Showdown sponsored locally by 96.3 WGOG. Reece advanced last year to the regional finals in the national competition and has since entertained audiences from New Orleans to Nashville and plans on a Las Vegas tour later this year.

Ward, who entered the Showdown when she was eight and won a year later, has opened for Martina McBride, Suglarland, Diamond Rio, Ty Herndon, and others and has been invited to sing at the 10th anniversary Memorial Service for 9/11 in New York City.

Jansen, who has performed for audiences in Nashville and Charlotte, recently completed her first CD project in Nashville.

Moore is the most recent winner of the Texaco Country Showdown held in July and will compete in October for the region title in Columbia. She has performed for audiences in Nashville and Greenville.

Bowen will present a full show at 5:30 pm on Sept. 8 on Main Street near the Depot. She, along with artists Blake Shelton, Zac Brown Band, and others are featured in the soundtrack for the new motion picture "Footloose" due out in October. The sound track for the movie, a re-make of the 1984 movie starring Kevin Bacon, will be available across the nation soon. Bowen, 15, will perform some of her original songs.

The other teens will present a full set each on Sept. 10 beginning at 11 a.m. on the Stage on the Green located at Retreat and Main Streets.

Also performing during the Apple Festival will be the nationally-traveled Shawn James Band based in Salem, nationally-recorded, singer-songwriters Russell Dean of Westminster, Carol Strickland of Walhalla, and Atlanta singer-songwriter Emily Lynch.

Burroughs added that other bands and groups scheduled include Carolina Backroads, Gypsy Wind, City Street Band, Shades of Blue, Bobby and the Allstars, Confederate Attitude, the West Oak Middle School Band, the West Oak Middle School Chorus and singers from the Corinth Baptist Church.

On Sept. 8, the Flashbacks will follow Bowen for a special Apple Festival Beach Party and Street Dance on Main Street.

Admission to all musical activities is free and artists will have copies of their CDS and DVDs for sale during the festival.



Emily Lunch is pictured performing in the WGOG studios in Walhalla. An Atlanta resident, Lynch is a Clemson University graduate and was a member of the Tiger rowing team.

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