

Steve notes that, regardless of which band gathers for practice, team members are expected to spend time outside practice sessions to prepare for their part of the performance.

"That makes practice more efficient and fun," Steve says. "Annette is worship pastor at our church, so she usually leads practice sessions. We are all open to suggestions and critique during practice. We've held discussions about leaving egos at the door and establishing strong relationships with one another so that we're able to give our best to the music."

Hunter, who plays several instruments, spends short bites of time with each one to advance his skill.

"I take turns on the different instruments I play so they're all advancing," Hunter says. "Working at them for short time spans helps keep the music fun and makes me excited about playing again."

Bringing pleasure to listeners is a reward that all three share. Being able to glorify God in the process is also important to them.

"I have a passion for using the gift God has given me to acknowledge him and give him glory," Annette says. "Hearing music makes people feel good, whether that's worship music or a song that revives happy or sentimental memories. I like being part of that."

Steve agrees with his wife's comments and adds that enjoying the music experience as a family has its own reward.

"I love being with my family," he says. "It makes me proud to see my wife and son enjoy the gift of music. Our 16-year-old daughter, Hailey, just started singing with us. Our other two children have musical interests and gifts, too. Why not do something we all enjoy and do it together?"

Hunter won't mind if music is a significant element of his future career. He plays jazz, blues, folk and worship as circumstances require. His plans to take up teaching could mesh well with increasing his musical ability.

"I'm not majoring in music," Hunter says. "If some level

of fame or something like that happens, awesome. If not, it won't ruin my life."

Hunter relies on his family for honest feedback about his musical performance. Steve takes care to be constructively honest.

"When he started playing bass in our group I was giving him a lot of direction," Steve says. "I felt I was being too hard on him and spoke to him about it after practice. He agreed that the feedback was difficult, but felt it made him a better musician."

Hunter is aware that the strong leadership skills his family members possess can sometimes lead to clashes of the will. However, he believes making the effort to continue developing their ability to play together makes it well worth the struggle.

"We are strong-willed, idea people," Hunter says. "It's interesting when we disagree because I'm so much younger than my parents. But I'm often the one leading the band and the one on the bill when it comes to shows. That means that what I say goes, so that dynamic is odd since I'm not usually the one making decisions in my family."

All three look forward to continuing the practice of performing music as a family.

"Music usually transcends differences," Annette says. "It takes a humble attitude to gather with other musicians and work together to produce great music. We're really blessed to be able to work with each other and band members outside our family."

"Especially when we play music at church, we know we're helping other people connect with God," Annette adds. "Sometimes music reaches people faster than anything else. I'm proud of my family, of my son. It's interesting that we reverse leadership roles sometimes in our bands. It's fun to see our children grow and know others are inspired by the music and the songs Hunter writes."

"Music is such a great gift," Steve says. "We want to use it as a way to give back to God."

■ By Loretta Sorensen

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