

# TO HIS OWN BEAT

*Jordon Stanley's artistic expression lives in rhythm — and that's what ties his music and writing together to make his life's work.*

BY KRISTINA GADDY  
PHOTOS BY CAROLINE J. PHILLIPS



Jordon Stanley, an in-demand drummer for musicians and groups as varied as gospel, pop, jazz, and indie rock

**As an in-demand drummer** across the Eastern Shore, he's played with musicians and bands as varied as gospel singer Princess Lee, singer-songwriter Kentavious Jones, dream pop band Del Florida, indie-rock band Heartside, and the Front Porch Orchestra's *Bluegrass Nutcracker*, always providing the steady backing the bands need. And although currently separate from his musical life, his written work is

grounded in meter and pulse, whether it is poetry or prose.

Stanley's love of music and words started when he was growing up in Preston. Around nine years old, he had the opportunity to start an instrument at school. Inspired by his father's love of jazz, he first wanted to play the saxophone. He quickly learned that he lacked the embouchure for getting the sound out of the saxophone's reed, so

Stanley settled on the flute.

After a year of playing the flute, when he was about ten, everything changed for Stanley. His mother took him to see the movie *Drumline*.

The film follows Devon Miles, played by actor Nick Cannon, as he morphs from a drummer in Harlem to the member of a highly respected marching band at a college in the south. On the big screen, the precise rhythms

and high energy of the drumline drew Stanley in. He couldn't hide his enthusiasm.

After the movie was over, he remembers his mother turning to him to say, "You probably want to play the drums now, right?"

He did, and his parents supported the idea.

Stanley immediately switched to the percussion section of band, where

he started with just a snare drum. As a drum teacher today, the percussionists know that parents can have a hard time encouraging young drummers. Kids enjoy beating out rhythms on almost anything they can find, which is different from committing to learning an instrument.

After a few weeks, Stanley remembers his father asking him, "If I buy you a drum set, will you stick with it?"



Above: The rhythm of words has captivated Stanley since his middle school days. In 2019, he published his debut collection of poetry.

He said he would, and he did. As an adult, he appreciates that his dad wanted him to be serious about the instrument.

Stanley started playing with the band at his Methodist church during worship services because they didn't have a percussionist. They also didn't have a drum set, which meant that every Sunday, he and his father would haul the drums back and forth from church.

The church became a special place for Stanley to share his talent.

"That's really where I got my start," he said.

Intent on keeping his promise, the percussionist kept at it through middle and high school, and then entered the University of Maryland Eastern Shore as a music major.

At UMES, his second rhythmic love re-entered his life.

In middle school, Stanley had become interested in the percussion of words. "I had a group of friends that really liked hip hop and rap," he says. "We'd write rhymes instead of doing classwork, then read them to each other at lunch."

It was the first time he realized that he liked what words could do. They could make people think, and "make people say hmm and ah." But growing up in Preston, Stanley felt hip-hop and rap were from a different place, and he didn't feel like he could adequately identify with it. He stopped writing rhymes.

In college, he saw a video of people doing spoken word poetry, and Stanley says he "fell in love" with words again. He saw that hip hop and rap and his love of words could be expressed in myriad ways, from writing his own poems to simply reciting poetry from memory. He started writing poems and performing them at church events, open mics, and weddings.

For Stanley, poetry pairs with his career as a drummer, and reflects who he is and his background. In his debut collection, *Poems from a Poem* published in 2019 by Salt Water Media, his faith is unmistakable. He writes in his forward,

"Who I am as a person, the depth of what I have to offer as a human being, the very essence of who I am is meant to be appreciated and effective for good."

He also uses his own interpretation of Ephesians 2:10, "For we are God's own poem, recreated in Christ Jesus that we may do those good works which God predestined for us, that we should walk in them." He says that his poems are about things that have happened to him, grounded in his experience growing up and living on the Eastern Shore, and he hopes his experiences can be helpful to someone else.

His poetry also reflects his goals for his own musical career. His poem "Butterfly" begins:

*I've heard butterflies speak;  
I've seen butterflies live.*

*They taught me that cocoons are  
as temporary as they want to be.*

*Just give it time, stay a while.*

*But contain the consistency of  
the sun when you come out.*

*Wherever you're welcomed, fly.*

As a drummer, Stanley has welcomed a variety of opportunities that come his way. In the last half-decade, he's played with bands that range from jazz to indie rock to bluegrass to pop, and he's played on gospel and singer-songwriter albums. The genre doesn't really matter to him.

"It's more about having fun and doing something challenging," he says.

In the coming year, he's planning to break out of the cocoon of backing up other people and bands.

"I've played on a lot of records and helped people release their music," he says. "And I feel like I want to do that now, put something into the world."

Stanley lights up when he talks about potentially pairing his music and poetry together in an album of spoken word poetry or writing more song lyrics. In addition to the support he's received from his family throughout his life, he's happy that he has friends and musicians in and around Easton who want to see his creative pursuits succeed. ●



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