

Musical Chair

LUCI BUTLER

At a time when most people are still settling into a first career, St. Augustine's Lucinda Butler has been down that path and back again and taken a somewhat different musical path than most. And she's loving her life right now.

By Steve Parr | Photography by Rob Futrell



Originally from Savannah, Georgia, Luci moved to New York City to work as a music therapist after graduating from the University of Georgia with a double major in psychology and music therapy. While in New York, she worked at Beth Abraham Health Services in the Bronx. At this point, music therapy was her career, and the thought of being a touring musician never crossed her mind.

It was during her time in New York, however, when her performing career began to flourish. Luci met the musician Moby, probably best known for the "Bourne Identity" theme "Extreme Ways," when he joined the Board of Directors of the music therapy organization at Beth Abraham. At the ripe old age of 26 she embarked on a world tour with Moby, remaining with the band for a year and a half, but would often join the band for shows here and there. She also recorded the album "Last

Night" with the band. "I never planned on being a touring musician. But the first time I stood on stage... I knew that was what I was supposed to do. I'd always been a creator. That's what I loved about music therapy. I could create this whole world of rehabilitation. Now I was delivering the message." After her time with Moby, Luci's path was clear. She enjoyed the energy of life on the road. In 2006, she had the opportunity to join the venerable and renowned Trans Siberian Orchestra. She would remain with them for the following seven years.

Luci considers herself more of musician than a keyboard player. She began formal training at age four, but Luci says her mother and grandmother insist that she was playing recognizable songs on her Fisher-Price xylophone at the age of two. It took some time for them to find someone to teach her at such a young age. While she cites no one person as an inspiration, she's quick to mention that she would take a

piece like "Light My Fire" by The Doors and memorize, note for note, the opening organ solo. But, if she had to pick a particular influence, it would be The Beatles' "Abbey Road" album, which her parents would play for her as an infant when she couldn't sleep. Because of that album Luci says "I love melody and beauty and expression. I've never become totally obsessed with blowing people's brains out with my keyboard skills. Although, growing up in piano lessons I would only learn giant and impressive pieces by my favorite romantic composers like Brahms, Beethoven and Rachmaninoff."

It was during her time with Trans-Siberian Orchestra that she fell in love with St. Augustine and quickly decided this is where she needed to be. She knew no one when she moved here. She only knew she was home. She had come to St. Augustine to, as she puts it, "heal from Manhattan" and to sort of isolate herself. After preparing herself emotionally for a full year, she made



Combining the healing powers of music and science, Luci thrives in engaging a group of residents at Bayview Healthcare. She uses creativity (on-the-spot song writing), movements (full body deep breathing), and memory access (remembering song lyrics) to create a beneficial session.



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the decision to leave Trans-Siberian Orchestra to devote herself to uncovering and creating the music she wanted to share with the world.

When asked what her most memorable gig has been, the answers (she has two) come easy. With Moby, it was the Splendor In The Grass Festival in Australia, playing to 80,000 people. The single "Lift Me Up" was on the charts there. "The audience; all 80,000 of them, started jumping up and down in synchronicity. It was breathtaking to see so many people synchronized by music like that."

For Trans-Siberian Orchestra, "We were playing shows at the Meadowlands and the Nassau Coliseum on Long Island and Steven Tyler of Aerosmith was our guest for those shows. I don't have that moment with too many celebrities, but to see him and hear him

and get to perform with him on stage, 10 feet in front of me, was amazing."

Locally, Luci has again become excited about doing more work in the music therapy field. While she hasn't yet hung out her shingle, she's worked with Bayview Healthcare and, most recently, Buckingham Smith Assisted Living Facility. At Bayview, she's proud that the groups she's worked with, which were once eight to ten people, now number 15-20. The doubling in size of the groups, she says, is indicative of how effective music therapy is.

The excitement she felt when she first became involved in the field hasn't waned an iota, and that's evident when she talks about why she loves it so much: "Music enters the brain in many different areas. If you look at MRI scans of the brain while music is playing

it's not only the auditory area that lights up. It's the motor area, the speech area, the memory area, the emotion/mood area, the cognition area, and many others relative to each person and his or her relationship to the music. Studies in neuroplasticity confirm the brain creates new neural pathways to repair itself, and music therapy can directly guide this process."

Luci is currently in the studio recording the first album of her original music project "Light Elixir," but she also has her eyes back on the road and getting back to touring at some point in the future.

It'll be interesting to see how long she lets herself stay out there.

www.lucindaannebutler.com