



## DURHAM STAR PROFILE

# Quinn Mills

By Rob Caldwell

Most of the big pop hits of today are not written by the singers, but rather by a handful of writers and producers. The media has called this practice the end of the singer-songwriter era, but Quinn Mills, a 17-year-old musician from Ajax, is bucking that trend. Mills, who recently signed a record deal and is working on his second release, has a rapidly growing audience and writes his own hook-filled, accomplished songs. “Most of the artists I like are songwriters,” he says, naming Stevie Wonder, Ed Sheeran, Elton John, and Scarborough’s the Weeknd as some of his influences. “I also really like a rapper named Childish Gambino – he produces his own music and I really respect that,” he adds.

Despite his young age, Mills has been on the scene for a while, having first performed at age 10. “I was in a band called Broken Record with my older sister Jessica, and we used to play around town. I started writing songs seriously when I was 13 and performing by myself a year later. I was in another band called Lakeshore East with some friends and then I decided I wanted to pursue it on my own.” A self-released EP of his own songs attracted the attention of record label MP Music House, which signed him and has since sent him to studios in New York City and Nashville, where he’s recorded with veterans including Neil Young drummer Chad Cromwell, and Buddy Hyatt of Toto.

The bright, upbeat “James Dean,” from those sessions, has been released as a single with an accompanying video. “James Dean” came about when he was asked to write a song to go with the phrase “Haven’t you ever wanted to be like James Dean?” He says, “I started with a little melody that sounded a lot like a 1950s musical progression and I built some verses around it and the chords came out of that.” Though he also plays piano, he says “I usually write on the guitar – it’s my favourite instrument that I play. I love it.”

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Mills is using today’s technology to expand the range and possibilities of what a singer/songwriter can do. “I started off playing electric guitar,” he says. That’s changed, however. “Once I started using loop pedals [which record short instrumental passages and play them back in a loop] I found out you can do percussion on the acoustic. That really piqued my interest, so I started using the acoustic guitar a lot more in my shows.”

Though most of his performances have been met with enthusiasm, some crowds have been a little tougher. While on a recent visit to New York, he played an open mic in Long Island. “When I got there, it was a really heavy rocker/metal crew and someone from Black Sabbath was running it and I asked to play. He seemed reluctant to let me on stage but finally agreed after my mom came and said hello,” he laughs. “So, I played some songs I wrote and he really liked them. It was very, very nerve wracking though.”

Speaking of “The Big Apple,” Mills will be living in New York City part-time soon with his mother. “I find to really pursue a career [in music] you have to go to America. Plus, a lot of people I’m working with live in the city and there’s a lot of opportunities there. They call it the City of Opportunity for a reason I suppose!”

Though his music career may take him far afield, Quinn Mills will always have a special connection to Durham. “One thing I really like about Ajax is Debbie’s Café. I’m neighbours with the owner and she let me play my first gig there. She was one of the only people who would let me play when I was younger and I’m really thankful for that.”

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Check out Quinn Mills online at [www.quinnmillsmusic.com](http://www.quinnmillsmusic.com).