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Todd Sarvies hits the big time

Local rocker still alive on P. Diddy's 'Starmaker' on MTV

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Special to Metromix
August 18, 2009

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For most musicians, life is a constant road of gigs that often don't capture the dream of becoming a mainstream star. Let's face it, only a few make it to the big time, and fame can come and go before you've finished writing your next song. For local rocker and songwriter Todd Sarvies, a big break has come in the form of P. Diddy's 'Starmaker,' which currently airs on MTV every Sunday (9:00 PM). One of 14 artists on the show, Sarvies has already survived the first episode, which last week saw two contestants get cut. The eventual winner gets a deal with Diddy's Bad Boy Records label, so yeah, the stakes are high. Metromix recently talked to Sarvies about the show, how he made it to the final 14 and his thoughts on P. Diddy.

Can you tell us how you got involved with the show?

Well, it was a random e-mail that I got that was talking about the audition. The reason I guess I got involved with it was I saw that Diddy was looking for something new, he was looking for not necessarily a hip-hop or R&B singer, he was looking for something to expand Bad Boy and the stretch of genres they are involved with. So, I thought that was kind of interesting, and I started looking into it. Then they had an audition at [Blueberry Hill](#), so I said, 'Well, they're coming to St. Louis.' So, my fiancé and I stood in line for six hours, and I auditioned, and I got a call back and they flew me out to New York to sing again in front of Diddy and Mark Burnett and all the producers on the show, and later on I found out that I made the cut and I was going to be on the show, so that's how it all went down.

And how many artists are there on the show?

We started out with 14, and they sent two home (on the first episode). So, I'm in the top 12 as of now. The show has been filmed, but I can't elaborate!

When you were in St. Louis at Blueberry Hill trying out, who was evaluating you? And was it just you and your guitar up there?

Yeah, I just went up in front of some handpicked judges who Diddy picked out and sent on the road. There was an A&R rep from Bad Boy and some talent scouts that were basically doing the judging. I just went up there with just me and my guitar, singer-songwriter style, like I've always done, and that's how I did it.

And you auditioned songs that you wrote?

I auditioned with one of my own the first time. And then they asked me to come back and do a cover. So, I did a version of Radiohead's "High and Dry."

Great song.

Yeah, they seemed to like that. (On the first show) I did a Panic at the Disco song, you know, something a little more MTV.

I bet it's interesting watching yourself on MTV.

It was real strange, I hadn't seen any of the video. We didn't get to see anything! We saw the performances backstage, but I didn't get to see myself on camera.

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When you were filming the show, how involved did you get with Diddy?

You know, all I can say about Diddy is he's a businessman. I didn't get to hang out with him or anything. He's very professional. When he walks into a room, the whole mood kind of changes. Everyone just kind of shuts up and it's like, 'Oh, Diddy's here.' He's a man who commands a lot of respect.

Do you think he has a good understanding of the music you're playing though?

You know, Diddy's been around for a long time. He's seen a lot of musicians come and go. I'm sure he's very familiar with everything. I don't think he's necessarily worked with anything along the lines of what I do, but I think that's the point of all this—trying to get to new markets.

And there's still mutual respect for just being an artist.

Definitely. I think there is a mutual respect for just being a musician. Like I said, Diddy's been there and done that, and he's been doing it for a long time.

Are the other artists on the show playing similar music?

We all have our niche. Everyone was a little bit different in one way or another. I was kind of like the token rocker. There was a girl who was a country singer. A little bit of blues, rock, country...a hodge podge of pop and everything.

So did you just fly out there with your guitar and just hope for the best?

Pretty much!

What do you expect the show is going to do for your career—do you have any expectations?

I would hope the show would open some doors. I've been driving around the Midwest and playing shows locally for a good part of my life now, and it's a long road of building a fan base when you're doing it the grassroots way. So, getting a chance to be on MTV and perform in front of millions watching at home is an exciting opportunity. The potential of it being a launch pad for something bigger is there. I can only hope for the best.

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