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Photo by Amy Salvagno

The world's youngest drummer, 3-year-old Julian Pavone, performs at University Liggett with a few Motown guitarists and fellow school drummers, including eighth-grader Christopher Monsour and senior Michael Ignani, left.

One for the ages

Drummers, from preschooler to senior, jam at ULS

By Amy Salvagno
C & G Staff Writer

GROSSE POINTE WOODS — It was a jam session for the ages — and for all ages.

Julian Pavone, the world's youngest drummer — as validated by the Guinness Book of World Records — and a University Liggett preschooler was joined Nov. 15 by new musician friends and a few Motown legends for a special performance that brought the Upper School community to its feet.

Pavone, a Bloomfield Hills 3-year-old, was nearly hidden behind his towering drum set that sat in between fellow ULS drummers Michael Ignani and Christopher Monsour. For nearly 45 minutes, the trio kept the beat and pounded out rhythms with Motown musicians Michael Powell, Rocky Segrino and Ralphe Armstrong.

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One for the ages

“It was a great privilege to play with such high-talent guys. I really appreciate it,” said Monsour, an eighth-grader.

As for Pavone, who this year received the Rock and Roll Lifetime Achievement Award, the two are blown away by him.

“He has great potential. By the time he’s in eighth-grade, he will be the next John Bonham of Led Zeppelin,” said Monsour.

“Being able to play with him and Christopher — the relationship is just beneficial in a lot of ways,” added senior Ignani.

According to parents Bernie and Lisa, Pavone began drumming long before he was even born.

“In retrospect, it was in the womb. He would kick me regularly,” remembers Lisa, a 1994 ULS alumna.

At 3 months, Pavone — in his baby carrier — was seated at his dad’s drum set.

“I began to play and he reached up and held onto the drum sticks,” remembers Bernie, a longtime drummer who works in the music business. “He’s got more skill than I do.”

By 6 months — from his high chair — Pavone was reportedly doing drum rolls.

“It’s amazing that he’s my son,” said Lisa. “Every time I see him, he still amazes me.”

The couple decided to place their prodigy at ULS over private schools in their westside neighborhood.

“The knowledge here is above and beyond ... it’s a natural fit,” Lisa said.

Pavone has graduated from the high chair to the drum stool, though he does most of his playing just standing in front of the set, playing rock, jazz and fusion beats.

Though his young career began by simply entertaining family, Pavone was quickly catapulted to stardom and has since been signed as a member of the United Drum Line; recorded his first CD; performed for the Cleveland Cavaliers, the Detroit Pistons, and at the Chicago Cubs opening day VIP party; inspired a series of children’s books; performed at the House of Blues and the Cleveland Grand Prix; launched his own clothing line; and performed at the largest classic car show in the world.

And his attendance at ULS will cast more of a spotlight on the music program, one that falls behind the school’s rigorous academic program, said instrumental music teacher Rich Fanning.

During the performance, the group played a few familiar songs, including “Brick House,” and Pavone’s favorite, “Give up the Funk.”

“This is a great way to bring music into the school,” said Powell, a multiple Grammy Award-winning guitarist who has worked with Aretha Franklin, Patti LaBelle, Gladys Knight and Peabo Bryson. “We were just coming in and having some fun playing with the guys.”

World renowned bassist Armstrong, who himself began playing at a young age, has performed and recorded with top artists from Herbie Hancock to Carlos Santana, BB King and Frank Zappa. Most recently, he’s taken Pavone under his wing, even playing

on his CD.

“I see talent and potential, and that’s the great thing about youth. We have to cultivate this talent in our country,” he said, noting that he had mentors when he was just starting out.

Of the three drummers, Armstrong added, “I’m sure we will be talking about them in years to come. They’re wonderful students and great guys to hang out with.”

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