

# Your Local Connection Examiner

Allentown • Millstone • Roosevelt • Upper Freehold

Millstone musician puts his heart and soul into 'The Atmosphere'  
Kevin Basko releases debut album produced by Glenn Stuart

BY JENNIFER KOHLHEPP Staff Writer



Musician Kevin Basko, 18, of Millstone, recently released his debut album, "The Atmosphere." He will attend Berklee College of Music in Massachusetts in the fall. PHOTO COURTESY OF JON MACAPODI MILLSTONE — When Kevin Basko, 18, first picked up a guitar in the fifth grade, he discovered much more than a hobby.

The guitar has been Basko's means of expression for the last nine years and he can no longer imagine his life without music.

"It will always be my life," Basko said. "The world needs music because music is the most universal joy there is. Out of all the arts in the universe, music goes the farthest and hits you the deepest."

After playing lead guitar in the New Jersey rock band Finale Hill, Basko set his course in a different direction. The release of his debut album, "The Atmosphere," in May marked the beginning of Basko's solo career. Produced by Glenn Stuart, lead singer of the B-Street Band, the album showcases Basko's talents as a singer, songwriter and musician. He incorporates acoustic, rock, jazz, Latin and world music into 12 songs that he recorded with Stuart for the Dreamland, NSB record label.

"My personal favorite songs on the album are 'Bluebird' and 'Counting Sheep,'" Basko said. " 'Bluebird' is a song that is very simplified and stripped down of everything but acoustic guitars. I love the simplicity of it. 'Counting Sheep' is one of the more powerful songs on the album."

The inspiration for "Bluebird" came from Basko's grandfather, who passed away just after Christmas. He suffered from Alzheimer's for years and referred to his wife of over 50 years as his bluebird.

"This song is written about her, but from his perspective," Basko said. "She was the ground beneath his feet, his North Star."

Basko wrote "Counting Sheep" while remembering what it felt like to fall asleep in his bedroom when he was a child.

"I tried to give 'The Atmosphere' a very well-rounded sound in an effort to show a mellower side of my guitar

playing and songwriting ability," Basko said.

Stuart serves as Basko's manager but refers to their relationship as a musical coop. Stuart met Basko as a part of Finale Hill and was pleasantly surprised when Basko's mom, Patricia, sent him a copy of her son's solo work.

"It was so different from what I had heard him do with the band and so good to me as its own thing that I knew I wanted to be involved with Kevin's music," Stuart said .

Stuart wanted to showcase Basko's voice and guitar playing with "The Atmosphere."

"The songs were pretty much recorded as they were written, maybe a little tweak here and there," Stuart said. "We also wanted to keep a lot of space in the music so we would strip back the tunes after initially tracking them. 'The Atmosphere' takes you to some different places both musically and emotionally. The cool thing about this CD is the way that Kevin can accomplish this and yet never get derivative."

Stuart recommends listening to "On the Edge of Sunshine and Rain," "Keep Me Cool" and "Shine Your Soul" while relaxing on the beach or by the pool. He looks forward to working with Basko on another album they hope to have out by the beginning of next year.

Basko planned on touring this summer to promote his new album; however, shortly after his CD came out, he injured his right hand.

"The good news is that after what appears to be successful tendon reconstruction by Dr. Teddy Atik, I was able to play again and am starting to book some local shows for the remainder of the summer," Basko said. "When I get up to Berklee in the fall, I hope to be able to perform at some local venues in the New England area on the weekends."

Basko plans to perfect his guitar playing, singing and songwriting at Berklee College of Music in Boston, Mass.

"I plan on studying songwriting and possibly arranging and composition," Basko said. "It is the premier college for contemporary musicians, and has a long list of alumni that are huge in the music scene. Berklee has an incredible staff and great connections in the music business."

Basko's musical journey began at Millstone Township Middle School, where he learned how to read music and play saxophone from teacher Gwen Parker.

"I also learned a lot about music in general from my high school music teachers, Peter Mauro and Jeff Santoro, at Allentown High School, where I played in the marching, symphonic and jazz bands," Basko said.

He began learning guitar in fifth grade.

"I have had guitar lessons from Jerry Topinka, an unbelievable jazz guitarist; Ed Cedar, a music teacher in the South Brunswick school system and Roosevelt resident; and Marc Muller, an instructor at Monmouth University and active musician who toured with Shania Twain and is currently recording with Bruce Springsteen," Basko said.

Basko can also play bass guitar, drums, piano and harmonica. He currently takes vocal lessons in Trenton with Richard Loatman and plays guitar and writes music for about four hours each day. His musical inspirations

include JohnMayer, Buddy Guy, Bill Withers, John Scofield and Paul Simon.

"I love all genres of music and I am trying to find a sound that covers all of my roots," Basko said. "I love blues, R&B, soul, classic rock, singer-songwriter type, and jazz and funk."

Basko has enjoyed writing his own riffs and licks on the guitar since the eighth grade. He loves the creative freedom of expression and being able to work at his own pace.

"I do feel that I am more creative and productive as a songwriter when I am writing for myself," he said.

His fans keep his head straight and have been nothing but supportive, Basko said.

"Recently, some of the songs from 'The Atmosphere' have been in rotation on Jango Radio," he said. "I'm very excited to say that I have picked up a number of new fans from all around the world. Their feedback has been very positive."

Basko has already written another album, and has another 20 songs "in the works."

"I'm having a contest on my Facebook musician page this summer to help choose songs for the next album and get feedback," he said.

He will perform at the Clarksburg Inn in Millstone on July 8. "The Atmosphere" is available on CD Baby, DigStation, iTunes, andAmazon. To find out more about Kevin Basko, visit [www.kevinbasko.com](http://www.kevinbasko.com) or his musician Facebook page.