

## Self-made musicians Billy Walton, Laura Crisci to play area venues

Billy Walton is one blues-rock guitarist who continues to take the trio format to new heights. Indeed, he's taken his music over to England and other parts of Europe in the last few years, and all without the push and support of a major or independent record label behind him.

Walton and his band perform two shows in the area this weekend (Jan. 27 and 28), tonight at Tara's Tavern in Wrightstown and Saturday night at the Mad Hatter, Ocean Avenue, Sea Bright.

In the fall, Walton and his bandmates, bassist William Paris and drummer Marcus Croan, made yet another tour of England. This time, they took along Spotswood-raised tenor saxophonist Rich Taskowitz, now of Jackson, who also performs frequently with Blue Highways. Taskowitz continues in the soul-blues tradition of other great honkers, like North Jersey's Jerry Weldon and Long Island's Harold Ousley.

Walton's new album, "Crank It Up," should be available shortly, if it's not already out at the band's gigs this weekend. They go back to England in April for another short

tour.

More information on the pair of shows is online at Walton's website, [www.billywaltonband.com](http://www.billywaltonband.com).

### Music for a cause

Asbury Park-raised singer-songwriter Laura Crisci spent some time away in Nashville but came back to the Jersey Shore several years ago. Crisci, a talented, insightful songwriter, is an alumna of both Brookdale Community College and Cook College at Rutgers University.

She has a big production on tap for next weekend, Feb. 4, at the Brookdale Performing Arts Center in Middletown that features many of the Shore area's best musicians. While the event is a fundraiser for the Brookdale Alumni Association, the concert is open to the general public.

"It's going to be an experiential event,

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much more than just a bunch of songs in a row," said Crisci last week.

"It's the Jersey Girl version of 'The Wizard of Oz,' 'cause I'm from here and I went away and came back."

"This guy said to me, 'You tell the story of the girl in the car that the Jersey Boy was thinking about,' and I said, 'Yeah, but now I'm driving the car,' and this show is going to depict that. It's going to be an adventure that will start out with a boardwalk theme with jugglers and artists and there could be a unicycle involved. It's a concert, but it's also actors and jugglers, and we'll probably have a boardwalk barker. It will tell the Joseph Campbell heroic journey, where you leave where you are from and you go off and realize there's no place like home," said Crisci, who now lives in Ocean County.

The songs and stories, she added, "are about leaving New Jersey and experiencing life and coming back home in an empowered way. You have to go away to become who you are, and it doesn't matter where you went, the heroic journey is the journey itself and that you lived to tell the tale."

Crisci's self-released, self-produced album, "All Is Well," has been well-received and will be for sale at the show. She'll be accompanied by P.K. Lavengood on guitar, Vini Lopez on drums, Arno Wendt (formerly of the Mothersound) on keyboards, Gary Oleyar on accordion, Paul Gayda on bass, Rick Brunemer on saxophone, and likely,

Lou Felipe, percussion.

For those unfamiliar with Crisci and her music, she said, "you can expect to have an experience that will either change your perspective or enlighten your perception of what it was like to grow up at the Jersey Shore."

"The decade doesn't matter," she added, " 'cause the heroic journey is timeless."

Tickets are \$20 for the general public, \$16 for Brookdale Community College alumni and \$12 for Brookdale students.

Call 732-224-2887 for more information.

*Richard Skelly hosts the "Low-Budget Blues Program" from 8-10 p.m. Thursdays on WRSU-FM New Brunswick. [www.nj.com/wrsu-fm](http://www.nj.com/wrsu-fm).*

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