



# Purely Perry

Local business executive—  
turned professional musician  
finds his key to happiness at,  
well, the keyboard



Some experts believe the secret to maintaining vitality and happiness lies in changing careers at age fifty. If that's the case, forty-three year old Parkland resident Perry Joslin has a head start. But rather than trading one occupation for another, he's merely added an arrangement to his repertoire of lifetime successes.

Such are the hazards of talent, hard work and determination.

The corporate community knows Joslin as partner and managing director over the State of Florida for Bearing Point, a spin-off of the Miami tax audit consulting firm KPMG LLP, where he oversees development for the State's general business practice. What Joslin's business associates didn't know about him until recently is that when the clock strikes 8pm, the business suit comes off, and Perry Joslin, jazz pianist and composer, surfaces.

Hold on now. If you're envisioning garage bands and B-rated jam sessions that never make it past the driveway, keep reading. This guy hardly needs to keep his day job. In fact, it might be the other way around, considering Joslin has consistently generated top sales dollars for the firm. If a quandary were to exist, it would more likely be about how Joslin can reconcile doing two things he's really good at. "The feeling I get from my profession is rewarding, but it leaves a void on the other side," he says. "The two make up the whole person."

The musical side of Joslin is at least partially attributable to genetics since his mother also played the piano, and although the label "prodigy" may or may not apply, it's difficult not to imagine the young Joslin as a mini, modern-day Mozart with unquenchable artistic compulsion. Few musicians recall dodging minor chords running backwards through their heads as toddlers. He also remembers his first piano lessons at age three and getting his hands smacked with rulers when he insisted on playing the standard key chords of C, G and E in reverse order. "It didn't sound right," he says. "It drove my piano teachers crazy. They even thought I might be dyslexic."

Joslin continued studying classical piano and playing chamber music while attending college preparatory schools in New England, and would eventually discover, if only by way of Beethoven, Brahms and Bach, that his intrinsic penchant for playing minor chords represented the distinctive sounds of jazz. While influenced by musical groups Chicago and Steely Dan, as well as Jeff Beck's *Wired* and *Blow by Blow*, it was the 1970s electric sounds of Miles Davis' *Bitches Brew* that "changed the way I looked at music," says Joslin. "It affected me greatly. I never looked back." Joslin's propensity for jazz was confirmed when a college

music professor noted his abilities, and by the time he graduated from Ohio Wesleyan University in 1983, he had formed an electric fusion band called State Red, and even opened for top names like Robert Palmer.

But call it occupational *West Side Story* if you will, and Joslin's love for music his "Maria." When you're a sixth-generation descendent of a prominent New England family (his Swedish maternal grandfather founded Pilgrim Village in Chatham, Massachusetts, and his father, an engineer, invented the breathing apparatus used in the helmets of Apollo II astronauts), expectations are clearly defined. "Being a musician ran counter to what was considered a respectable profession in my family," says Joslin, who even painted houses at one point to supplement his gig earnings. "It was always assumed that I would enter the business world, and much of my early schooling was taught with that philosophy in mind."

A quick study, Joslin is also a product of the schooling "it's never too late" and "good things come to those who are patient and play their cards right," having realized early on that if he were going to live the life he was accustomed to, as well as realize his musical ambitions, he'd better pursue a career in business first. Twenty years later, he returns to his music with maturity, financial savvy, and perhaps more appreciation for a true talent he always knew was there—albeit one that even the confidence—infused Joslin needed affirmed. It was his wife, Deborah, who after listening to him play in a "vacuum" every evening, finally said,

“I have a distinct style, although I didn’t know it at the time,” he says. “It’s a definite sound that permeates throughout the songs.”

“You really love this, don’t you? Just record it. Record *something*.”

The unique, discordant sounds of smooth jazz fused with overtones of blues stood out enough to catch the attention of accomplished drummer Lee Levin, who after hearing Joslin’s portable cassette player demo, went to watch him play at his home studio in Parkland—no small feat, considering Levin is rarely want for phone calls from stereotypical Top 40-wannabes.

“His jaw hit the floor,” says Joslin. “To have someone like *that* say you’re good is something.”

“What caught me was he was extremely serious about what he wanted to do,” says Levin, a double major in Studio Music and Jazz and Music Business from the University of Miami, who currently tours with Ricky Martin, and whose studio credits include Enrique Iglesias, Christina Aguilera and Clay Aiken. “There was no beating around the bush.”

Emerging from this union of like minds is the debut *Perry Joslin Project* CD—comprised of eleven compositions, and featuring, along with Lee Levin, top artists Ed Calle (Miami Sound Machine, Frank Sinatra, Vanessa Williams) on tenor sax, guitarist Dan Warner (Gloria Estefan, Julio Iglesias, Celine Dion), pianist Doug Emery (Clay Aiken’s *Measure of a Man*), flutist Nestor Torres (2001 Latin Grammy winner), and trumpeter Jason Carder (Placido Domingo, *Dirty Dancing: Havana Nights*) to name but a few. “All these other people started showing up,” says Joslin.

Keeping true to the origins of jazz music as an ideal inspired by passion and spawned from emotions, Joslin invites us into his soul with selections that reflect his new beginnings in the music business (*Here We Go*), as well as his adoration for wife Deborah (*MidDoe*). It’s all about replicating feelings, and the ultimate compliment for the composer would be for someone to say, “I like your music and it did *this* to me.” Despite his positive “never quit” attitude and extroverted-to-the-*n*-th-power personality, Joslin admits to the emotional risk associated with sharing this vulnerable side. “There is a high degree of trepidation because so many people said ‘I didn’t even know you played,’” he says, and admits to having “more angst over that than anything.”

The ultimate hurdle might be tapping into a highly competitive jazz market that captures maybe four to six percent of listening audiences. Most radio stations are now consolidated, with Clear Channel Communications (headquartered in San Antonio, Texas) owning most of them, according to Levin. “That makes it difficult for a local musician to get on the radio in his own city because no one who makes decisions lives here,” he says.

Still, “In less than a year he’s already farther than most people ever get,” Levin says. “His music is challenging in many ways—harmonically and melodically. Perry’s stuff reminded me of that ’70s and ’80s sound like Spyro Gyra. It’s pop enough to be accepted by most people without being too avant-garde or going over their heads.” With such a precise blend of what Levin describes as “a fusion between traditional jazz and pop music” comes “the potential to cross over into other markets like tel-

evision, movies, and commercials.” Enter “Purely Perry”—an accolade Joslin attributes to his self-denoted “off shuffle beat.” “I have a distinct style, although I didn’t know it at the time,” he says. “It’s a definite sound that permeates throughout the songs.”

Perry Joslin is perhaps as outside the box in everyday life as he is at the piano bench. He minored in music at Ohio Wesleyan, but majored in philosophy—“the art of persuasion, and good training for sales people,” he says. For a scholar in existentialism who spills outside of quadrants on personality tests, he hardly seems contemplative about the meaning of life, but rather focused on living it to the fullest, spewing witticisms and infectious humor along the way.

Hard work and challenges only fuel his Type-A nature. “Most people go through life scared,” he says. “I’m not happy with just one song.” He not

only knows he can play, but knows he’ll do something with it. He formed Palm Stone Productions with several of his successful peers to produce and promote the Perry Joslin Project. Wife Deborah, a biochemist who also trains Basenjis (an African dog breed), now devotes her energies to administering to the company’s business operations. She’s also been the most trusted voice of encouragement. “I don’t know what I’d do without her,” Joslin says. “I’m indebted to her. She’s the woman.”

Progress is already underway on a second CD, which will feature many of the same first-rate musicians; along with Latin pop artist and Grammy winner Jon Secada, and steel pan drummer, Andy Nerell, whose recording and performing credits include Aretha Franklin and Tito Puente, as well as commercials for Apple Computers, Sony, and Porsche. The goal is to have different artists on each recording, hence the name *Project*. “I write the songs, and then augment them to what other peoples’ strengths are.”

“Jon Secada was the real kicker,” he says. Secada recently asked Joslin to back up his tour.

The one question remaining is whether Joslin will in fact leave his day job. “I enjoy what I do professionally and don’t foresee any changes,” he says. “But you never know what will happen. I’ve already made my money, and my real love is music and always has been.”

Joslin’s father is not around today to watch his son marry his success in business with his instrumental calling, and a reflective Joslin gives a respectful nod to a fruitful career that has enabled him to pursue his dream. “I don’t know that I had the skill set,” he says in looking back at himself. “You don’t see many young jazz musicians. The music is harder, more complex.”

Who knows, maybe the residuals of grooming paid off after all. “I never quit,” he says. “I was always told, you will, you will, you will. And I did.”

*Perry Joslin Project recordings are currently broadcast on East Coast radio stations with hopes of future airtime on South Florida’s WLVE 93.9. Live performances kick off in San Francisco on February 22, 2005, with local shows in the works. For more information or to purchase CDs visit [www.perryjoslin.com](http://www.perryjoslin.com). CDs are also available through [cdbaby.com](http://cdbaby.com). Perry Joslin lives in Parkland with wife Deborah and their five “children”—three parrots and two Basenjis, Cody and Karly. ♦*



*Perry Joslin with his wife Deborah.*