



Photo provided

Former "American Idol" contestant Casey Abrams returns to the area on Saturday to kick off the Artists You Should Know Series at the Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre.

# Casey Abrams

Ex-'Idol' contestant  
kicks off LMC's  
rising artists series

## finds his voice

By **JEREMY D. BONFIGLIO**  
HP Features Editor

**BENTON HARBOR** — Casey Abrams has cougars on his mind.

The subject of his new tune "Cougar Town," however, isn't the puma, panther or mountain lion variety, but the 30- and-40-something women, who, as defined by the Urban Dictionary will "seduce as many game young men as she can possibly handle."

"It's really about my love for women who are a little bit wiser than most," the 23-year-old singer-songwriter says by telephone from Nashville, Tenn. "It talks about this magical town. I get picked up by this woman and she introduces me to all her cougar friends.

We go to Cougar Town and it's just this magic journey."

While it may not be as special as his fictional "Cougar Town," Abrams has been on a magical journey himself since his run on Season 10 of "American Idol" jump-started his music career. Known for his upright bass and soulful voice, Abrams finished No. 6 on the FOX singing competition show at age 19. Since releasing his self-titled debut in 2012 and eventually parting with the Concord Music Group label, Abrams, who performs Saturday at the Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre to kick off the Artists You Should Know Series, has immersed himself in finding his own musical path.

"I've learned a lot," Abrams says. "I learned to stand up for myself. There's always going to be people who want your music to be a certain way, but you are the one who has to play it every single night so you just have to learn to say no once in a while. But I've also learned what it is I want to say. I want to spread happiness and that's led to this jazzy vibe where I can just sort of scat my way out of any problem. It's been really fun finding that voice on stage."

Abrams, who was born in Austin, Texas, is the son of Pamela Pierce, a screenwriter and teacher who also plays piano and sings, and Ira Abrams,

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## ABRAMS

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a guitarist who teaches at Idyllwild Arts Academy, a private school in the mountains above Palm Springs, Calif.

“My mom taught me the piano and my dad taught me some guitar techniques and I just built on that,” Abrams says. “They introduced me to The Beach Boys and The Beatles and complex harmonies that really got me into music and playing. So I just kind of absorbed it all.”

By the sixth grade, Abrams began playing the electric bass and in time gained proficiency on guitar, double bass, cello, drums, even the sitar. It was at Idyllwild where Abrams met jazz instructor Marshall Hawkins, who introduced him to the upright bass.

“Marshall was such a big cheerleader,” Abrams says. “He made me realize

## IF YOU GO

**Who:** Casey Abrams

**When:** 8 p.m. Saturday

**Where:** Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre, 2755 E. Napier Ave., Benton Harbor

**How much:** \$25-\$34

**Contact:** 927-1221 or [www.lmcmainstage.org](http://www.lmcmainstage.org)

that it’s not about what you play but how you feel and how you feel in the moment. It’s all about subject matter and believing in yourself instead of let’s get each note perfectly right. He always says there’s no wrong note, just undesirable ones, and I still believe that.”

Abrams was a student at the University of Colorado when he auditioned for “American Idol” back in Austin, Texas. His run on the show certainly opened doors. After

“Idol,” Abrams headed to London’s Kensaltown Studios to record his debut album with producer Martin Terefe, whose credits include Jason Mraz, Train and Mary J. Blige.

The album peaked at No. 101 on the Billboard 200 with the radio-friendly single “Get Out” reaching No. 23 on the adult contemporary chart. The album also was highlighted by “Wore Out My Soul,” which shows his R&B balladeer chops, and “Blame It On Me,” which features Abrams’ soulful bass line and vocal agility. While most of the tracks off his debut album are still in rotation in Abrams’ current set list, he also says his split with Concord has opened new musical avenues.

“I feel so free. I feel like I can do anything,” Abrams says. “Obviously there’s not a big company backing you up, but you don’t really need that to make music. I’m in

Nashville right now writing songs and writing music that I really want to do rather than filling a quota. It’s really a beautiful thing.”

In addition to “Cougar Town,” Abrams – who is backed by guitarist Taylor Tesler and saxophonist Jacob Scesney – has been road-testing new material describing 2014 as a year of “pre-production” for his as-yet-untitled sophomore effort.

“It’s a giant experimentation,” Abrams says. “I feel like I’ve written the songs, but I’m constantly arranging them and rearranging them every single night. The plans are to play the new songs over and over again and see if people like it and see what changes I can make to it to make it better. I think playing them in front of an audience and getting their reaction is important before putting out the next album.”

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## HAVEFORD

western University, added a his most recent, “It All Be-

So not only is it a great song