

“Music is where I honestly belong,” freshman Brooks Brown said. “I can’t get enough of it.” Brown is involved in nearly every musical opportunity available to someone his age, and then some. He operates his own disc jockey business, which he began at the age of 13. He’s also the guitarist of an Indie band called Against the Generation, plays bass in the school orchestra and participated this summer in a program for up-and-coming young music producers sponsored by the Grammy Museum in Los Angeles. Though these musical commitments make many demands on his time, Brown said he never loses sight of the passion that drives him.

“It’s the thing I enjoy, the thing I fit in with. There’s something about music that’s really moving and energizing and exciting,” Brown said.

Turn it up, Mr. DJ

Brown said he thinks his youth gives him an advantage both in the DJing business and in the producer world he dreams of joining someday.

“It’s amazing to look on a website like Soundcloud and

see people who are this young and doing so well, at 15, 14, even 13 years old,” Brown said. “I strive to do that. Being young is knowing what’s coming next, going to parties and being inside the scene. If you’re an older professional DJ, it’s harder to stay connected to the scene.”

Brown differentiates himself from more established DJs in other ways, too.

“Some people out there aren’t really DJs. They’re so bland,” Brown said. “The difference with our business is that we’ll actually put on a show:

perform, get into the music, move around.”

Working at parties, Leawood Middle School “Friday Night Lives,” and bar and bat mitzvahs, Brown tries to create a uniquely high-energy environment.

“We try to develop an environment which feels like a performance, but it’s not just a guy pressing the play button,” Brown said. “You know a DJ is

doing his job if the music never stops, he makes smooth transitions between songs, and makes an atmosphere that brings the party to next level.”

Though it might seem an awkward task for a student to work at a party where his friends are having a good time, Brown said that’s the best part of his job.

“I enjoy shows [with people my age] the most,” Brown said. “[When I work at parties for] my friends, people who know me—I feel like I’m not working, I’m just having fun.”

“Being young is knowing what’s coming next”

Beats of the Future



At a Friday Night Live mixer at Leawood Middle School, Brown smiles as he cranks up the music. He said choosing playlists for younger kids can sometimes be a challenge. His schedule is demanding, too. “I have a gig once a month until May,” Brown said. Photo by Erica Emert.

Grammy connections

Those who have hired Brown to DJ at their parties aren’t the only ones who have recognized his talent. Last summer, he participated in a competitive summer music institute called the Grammy Museum “Music Revolution.” Program directors reviewed 300 audition tapes and selected 24 young artists from the area to participate. Brown, then 14 years old, was the youngest one there.

“Over four weeks I worked with producers and artists and all kinds of people from the music industry. It ended with a performance at the Kauffman Center,” Brown said. “The program was associated with the Grammys. The director of the [Grammy] museum, Robert Santelli, is a member of the department that picks Grammy nominees.”

Gifted teacher Michele Buche saw the music institute as a major step for Brown.

“Whenever someone that young gets into a cadre like [the Music Revolution project], I’m really impressed, because he can utilize those connections throughout his life,” Buche said.

This was the first time the Grammy Museum had launched such a program. The Kansas City area was selected because it is one of the only

major American cities that lacks a chapter of the Recording Academy, the organization that produces the Grammy Awards. As the project’s pioneers, Brown and the other musicians who participated last summer were flown out to the Grammy Awards for free.

“It was incredible,” Brown said. “Watching the awards live is a lot different from watching it on TV. You see the whole arena, you see the crowd. Whenever they’d go on a television break they’d announce it. They’d be like, ‘15 seconds until TV air, 10 seconds until TV air,’ and at the very end [they’d] be like, ‘applause please!’ and we’d all have to start clapping so the TV viewers would think we were having a good time, which of course we were.”

If the museum’s goal was to inspire these young artists by showing them the pinnacle of music achievement up close, Brown said it worked.

“You know that all your favorite people that you listen to are in the same room as you, and you can see them,” Brown said. “The whole experience was really motivational, the idea of maybe coming back there as a nominee in the future—hopefully the near future.”

The new age

Though Brown’s musical focus is always on the future, he still deals with an enormous personal tragedy in his past. In June 2009, his father passed away after an accidental overdose on the pain medication he’d been taking for chronic back and knee problems.

“It’s definitely a real shock, and to have that kind of thing happen at such a young age is just really a hit in the face,” Brown said. “It was a struggle, and we still struggle with it. Music has been a huge part of my life, a foothold for expressing myself. It was large factor in getting through that grief.”

Brown wants to devote his career to expressing himself through music, though he’s modified his early dreams of being a rockstar.

“When I was first starting out with music I was imagining myself to be a rockstar—big name, headlining shows, thousands of people,” Brown said with a laugh. “[Now] I want to end up working at a studio, being a studio engineer, producing for big name artists. As long as I’m doing something with music for a career, I’ll be happy.”

Orchestra teacher Stephen Phalp sees no

conflict among Brown’s diverse musical interests. “I think most students of his talents do balance electronic and classical [styles] very well,” Phalp said. “In a philosophical sense, they’re both very much the same. You’re trying to create emotional responses in a listener. Electronic music just does it in a different medium, but essentially music is music.”

Brown thinks this is a critically important moment to be involved in the music industry.

“It’s the new age. Pop music is straying away from the pop-y feel, becoming more like electronic music,” Brown said. “I think that there’s always going to be new music coming, and staying ahead of the game is an important part of any music career. That’s what I strive to do—to know what’s next, know what’s coming up.” ★

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Brown DJs at a Friday Night Live mixer at Leawood Middle School. His DJing career began when, at age 13, he worked at a friend’s birthday party. Photo by Erica Emert.



Brown’s laptop is a critical component of his DJing ensemble and of the music he’s produced on his own. “I have huge respect for any kind of music,” Brown said. “But I like electronic because it’s different and there are a lot of different subgenres.” Photo by Erica Emert.