

# Playing With Fire

Flame-haired throwback blues/hip-hop stylist  
Nick Greer gives old soul a new kind of heat.

| By Tara Seetharam | Photography by Brian Styles |



By the time Nick Greer was 10, fate had forced him to trade baseball games and birthday parties for a rotation of hospital rooms, thanks to a crippling case of asthma. His cosmetologist mother, having fallen on hard times, bounced him from city to city in Texas while keeping his health in check. Hoping to cheer him up one hospital-bound Christmas, she bought him a keyboard—and something clicked.

"It was almost like meeting the girl you know you're going to marry for the first time," Greer says of the instrument that became his coping mechanism. "It was instant." After a few years, the self-taught pianist had written more than 300 songs by rearranging chords he'd heard on the radio, and at age 14 the piano boy and crooner made his debut at a local open-mic night, with another push from Mom.

## Strike a Chord

Greer plays the Heights' Corkscrew Thursdays and on weekends.

Flash forward, and the rising star has both curbed his asthma and channeled his musical passion into a buzzy H-Town career. At 26, he recently released his first album and lent his enchanting voice to the new record by hip-hop faves the Niceguys. On April 27, he'll christen Houston's newest piano bar, The Corkscrew (1308 W. 20th St., 713.230.8352)—with "intimate" regular shows, sometimes pairing with other musicians, "to give Houston a truly rich, unique and genuine place to be entertained"—and in June, he'll play Free Press Houston Summer Fest.

With a blend of blues, hip-hop and soul, Greer insists he's just "trying to bring back an old idea, the raw aspect of music." The red-headed, bow-tie-wearing singer is an old soul, to be sure. Just check his influences of James Brown, Ray Charles and Bill Withers. But he also touts a modern, irreverent energy; check his *other* influences, Kanye West and Lil Wayne.

Greer prides himself on deftly deconstructing popular songs until the lyrics are the last thing standing: He's known to slow Salt-N-Pepa's "Whatta Man" into a smooth blues progression and flip Radiohead's "Creep" into a Motown ditty. "It's the way I remember [these songs]; the way I feel them," says Greer, who sports a green treble clef tattoo on his right wrist.

His *Nick Greer and the G's* disc—released last month by Wire Roads Studio—shows equal creativity, featuring "The G's" horn section. Lyrically, it covers typical fare of love, broken relationships and life struggles, but his mom's influence remains a point of reference. "Often, when it sounds like I'm singing about an abusive relationship I was in or a drug affliction... it's more or less me channeling [her] strength."

Greer lives in a Heights cottage with his girlfriend Irene and their dogs—a pleasant situation for a once beleaguered young boy who's found his groove at home and at work. "Schizophrenics talk about how they have voices in their heads; I just have tunes in my head," he says, the same sparkle glinting in his eyes that lit up a child's hospital room so long ago. "Either I make a career out of this, or I become that reclusive guy who only plays music to a few people at a café. And however it turns out, I really don't [care]."

