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Curt Yagi may never have tried his hand at music if not for an incident he calls “the Night Ranger Awakening.”

“My family didn’t really play a whole lot of music growing up, but my Mom and sister always played the piano, mostly classical and other music I didn’t recognize,” says Yagi, who was recently recognized by the San Francisco Bay Guardian as the best regional singer-songwriter of 2008. “When I was in high school, I remember my Mom bought a pop music book and played ‘Sister Christian’ by Night Ranger on the piano. I couldn’t believe that a rock/pop song could sound great on a piano and thought, ‘I have to learn how to do that.’”

So Yagi began teaching himself to play piano. He also bought a 4-track recorder to get an idea of what his voice sounded like to other people.

“That was a very eye-, or should I say ear-opening experience,” he says. “I was nervous to do it even on my own with nobody listening and simply hearing my voice in my headphones caused quite an alarm in me. I had no idea how to control my voice back then. Luckily, I kept recording myself and got better and better. By the time I went to an actual studio, I felt really confident and had such a blast.”

After college, Yagi picked up the guitar and began playing bass in local bands. He also landed a job as executive director of Real Options for City Kids (www.rocksf.org), a Bay Area nonprofit. Eventually, he decided to try fronting his own band and his current nine-person ensemble Curt Yagi and The People Standing Behind Me was born.

“I think the fact that I played bass for many years influenced my percussive style on acoustic guitar,” he says. “I think my music style is suited well for my voice.”

Yagi’s new album “What’s Come Over Me” is showing signs of commercial life, prompting him to consider just what the next step might be. “That’s a tough question because I really like my day job right now,” he says. “However, I would like to see my music gain additional momentum in the next couple of years. My goal is to get some mainstream radio play as well as get a few tracks in the TV/film industry. If anything, I am simply happy to play music and if I don’t have commercial success, I will still be playing music 10 years from now.”

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