

An exclusive magazine serving the residents of Lyme and Old Lyme

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NEIGHBORS

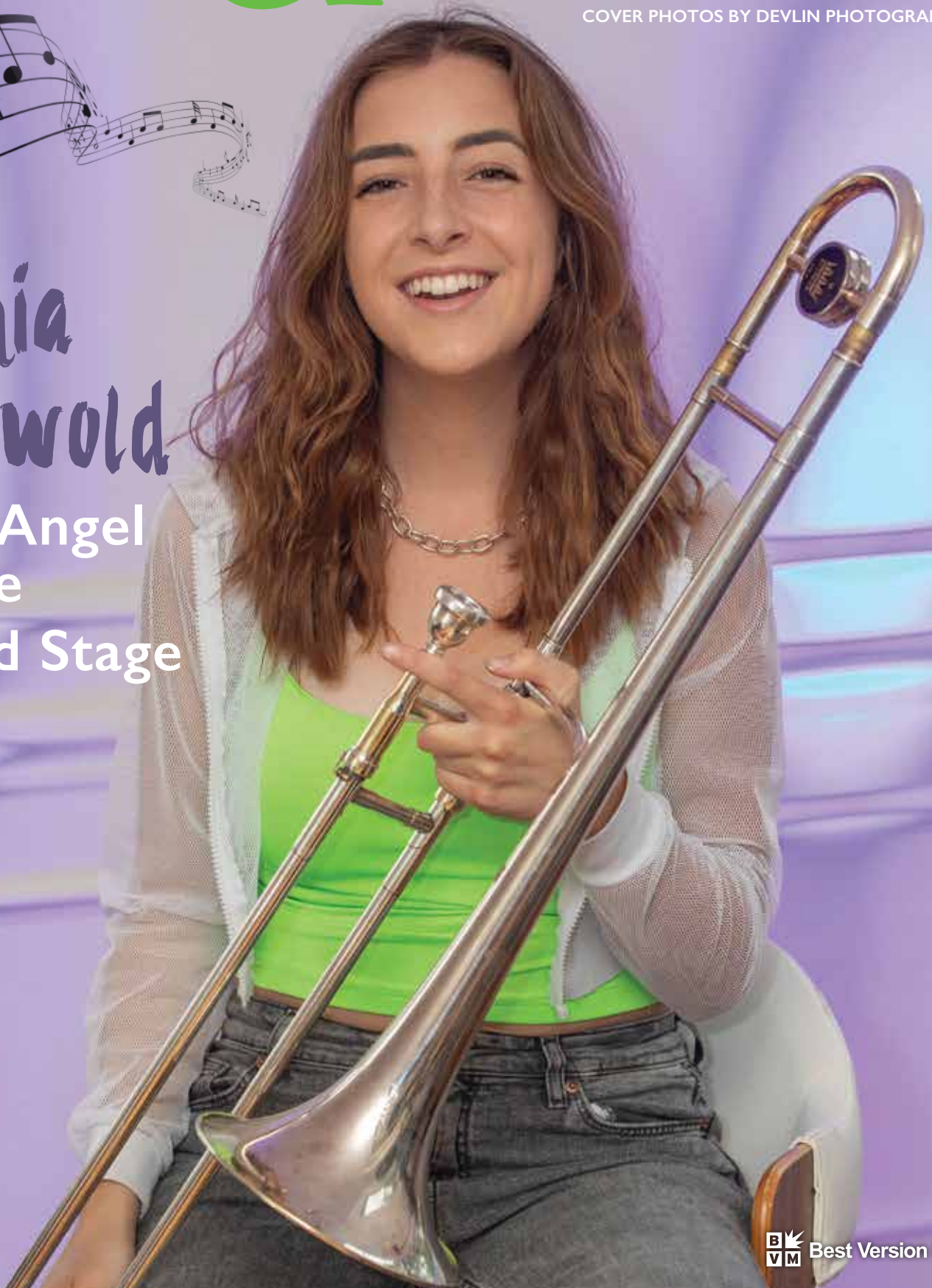
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**Sophia
Griswold**

**Teen Angel
on the
World Stage**



Sophia Griswold

Teen Angel on the World Stage

By Cameron Cooke | Professional photos by Chris Devlin of Devlin Photography



It's a sweltering afternoon in August and I'm at Savour in Essex, waiting to meet Sophia Griswold, this month's featured resident. Her mom Lorianne keeps track of Sophia's schedule, and they've managed to squeeze in some time to meet with me while Mark, Sophia's father, is hosting his radio show at nearby iCRV Radio. Time is tight, because in just a few days Sophia is leaving for Dubai. For the next seven months she will be performing in an ensemble band made up of artists from across the globe.

This is not just any gig. This is the World Expo - sometimes known as the World's Fair - one of the biggest, most spectacular events on the planet. This is the same event that saw the introduction of the Eiffel Tower, and later the Ferris Wheel. With over 190 countries participating and millions of visitors expected, it is, to put it simply, a very big deal.

At just 19 years old, Sophia will be the youngest member of the ensemble, chosen from some of the world's most talented performers. She may be young, but she performs with a maturity beyond her years, a quality that sets her apart from most of her contemporaries. An R&B trombonist and singer-songwriter, Sophia has been performing professionally since the age of 12, and she has played in serious venues across the country, including New York City's Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts and Newport Rhode Island's legendary Jazz Festival.

I have no idea what to expect from the teenager behind this incredible list of achievements, but I am imagining someone... glossy. An Instagram influencer type perhaps, with a well crafted image, and a polished look. But when she and her mother walk in the cafe, it is not a sophisticate I see but rather an ordinary, pretty girl wearing baggy lime green pants and a matching top. She's tall, coltish, and a little bit gangly, with an open smile and expressive hands that tend to move more when she starts talking about her favorite topic, which is, of course, music.

Sophia is warm and very polite. She thanks me for writing this article and for taking the time to meet her. I recall the words she used in her email the day before, "humbled, and excited for this opportunity," and I see now that she means it.

Her mom Lorianne sits a few tables away catching up on emails while Sophia and I talk. We start by discussing her father, a person never far from her thoughts. Mark's ability to host his radio show is a blessed return to normalcy for the family after a very long and arduous struggle. The last two years have been hard on everybody, but for this family, they have been particularly difficult and the pandemic is only a small part of it. Two years ago Mark became seriously ill. A bout of food poisoning triggered a condition known as AMSAN, a rare and particularly severe form of Guillain-Barré syndrome. With the support of friends, family, and the excellent staff at Gaylord Hospital, Mark is slowly recovering. He has learned to speak again, and his mobility has greatly improved. Throughout his rehabilitation, Sophia's music was a healing force. Week after week, she would sing and play guitar at his bedside. Their shared love of music was a key part of his recovery.

these words, I am struck by her poise and maturity. This dichotomy is one of the most interesting things about Sophia Griswold. Most of the time she acts like the teenager she is, but when the conversation turns to something she feels passionate about, she reveals a maturity and focus beyond her years.

“
One of the most naturally talented musicians that I have ever had the pleasure of working with.”
 - Jay Wilson,
 LOLHS Band Director

This focus will undoubtedly serve her well. “I always knew, without a doubt, that I wanted to build my life around music,” she says, “but you need to have a kind of tunnel vision in order to pursue such a crazy career path.” Lorianne says she too always knew that Sophia would be living a life of music. “She got her first drum kit from Santa at age 8, and once she started playing, that was it. She has an ear for it. It’s instinctive - not something that you can teach.” Sophia started playing guitar at age 12, and it came naturally to her. She taught herself to play with a little help from her friends at *Guitar Hero*.

Sophia's outlook on life was profoundly changed by the experience. She's become philosophical about it: “Life is unpredictable. You can't plan for it. For me, it's about living in the present, and making now a priority.” A few minutes ago, she was a goofy college kid, but as she says

Innate talent isn't enough to forge a career in such a competitive industry, but Sophia's passion and drive was recognized and encouraged by those around her: “I was really lucky,” she says. “I had an amazing support system, not just in my family, but also in the community.”

The Lyme & Old Lyme Neighbors Resident Feature is sponsored by Benchmark Wealth Management, LLC.

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Lyme-Old Lyme High School has a world class music program, and Sophia's teachers acted as mentors, encouraging her to pursue her dream. Band director Jacob Wilson describes her as "one of the most naturally talented musicians that I have ever had the pleasure of working with." And choral music teacher Kristine Pekar says "what is hard to capture on paper is Sophia's gift as an entertainer. I have never had a student who could stand up in front of an audience and reach out to everyone, showing her personality and engaging them in her performance. Her outstanding musicianship is evident in the many honors she's received. But what really sets her apart in my mind is her incredible personality and gift for staying positive no matter what life throws at her."

Reaching out to an audience is something that Sophia learned at a young age from another mentor, family friend Ramblin' Dan Stevens. "One evening he pulled me up on stage. I was really young, and I was just thrown right into it. This immersive experience was really how I learned to feel comfortable performing. Not just through training and lessons, but through experience."

These performances helped her to stand out and gain a full scholarship to the prestigious Berklee College of Music in Boston, Mass. "I'm in love with the school," she laughs. "The energy is crazy. Everyone is so open and forward thinking." Her curriculum is varied - she is studying music business, as well as contemporary writing and production, and songwriting, just to name a few.



But performing is what she really loves, and spending a gap year in Dubai was an opportunity not to be missed. "It's magical to be in a room full of people and to be able to transfer energy," she muses. "It's an instant way to connect, by bringing people into the moment. Age, gender, background - none of that matters. When I'm playing with a crowd, it's almost like meditation. I am centered, and happy, and I can just be my best self."

For a teenager raised in a small town, the prospect of spending seven months in the Middle East could be incredibly daunting. But she's not really nervous. She's focused on the music and brimming with excitement. Her joy and exuberance are infectious, and I cannot help but be excited for her; if not a little disappointed that I won't be able to see her play live any time soon. I'm not too worried though. Something tells me that we'll be hearing much more from Sophia Griswold in the years to come.



Award-winning R&B trombonist and singer-songwriter Sophia Griswold has been performing professionally in front of audiences since the age of 12. She has attended acclaimed music programs through Jazz at Lincoln Center and the Berklee College of Music where she has worked with Grammy Award winners including Terri Lyne Carrington, Danilo Perez, Ted Nash, and Carole King. She has performed at The Newport Jazz Festival (RI) and Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola (NYC). She was accepted into 2019's All-National Jazz Band along with the 2019-2020 Jazz at Lincoln Center Youth Orchestra. She makes radio and TV appearances, and professionally gigs with jazz, soul, blues, rock, and funk groups. Sophia is currently in Dubai performing at the World Expo.