

November 27, 2011 | By Sam McDonald, smcdonald@dailypress.com | 757-247-4732

Seaford songwriter's Christmas tune, sung by a California girl, makes rounds nationally

Through the spirit of the holidays, Seaford (Virginia)-based singer-songwriter Ron Fetner recently found himself collaborating with a 10-year-old girl from California whom he's never met.

The results of their unlikely connection is "My Name is Christmas," a Fetner-penned tune that, with the young woman's vocal, has become the featured single from a new CD made to raise money for child abuse victims.

Fetner, 63, said he's proud of the result of the collaboration, but he admits it initially took him by surprise.

"When I first heard it, I was shocked," said Fetner, who has been writing and performing rootsy folk-oriented songs locally since 1986. "It doesn't sound anything like my [original] version. But then I thought, every grandmother and mother in the world are going to love it. She's really a dynamic little kid. For the purpose of Christmas, it works really well."

That dynamic kid is Robynne French, a pint-sized contemporary gospel singer who lives in the Southern California town of Temecula. French is signed to a San Diego Christian record label.

"She wants to use her voice, the gift that God's given her, to make an impact," her mother, Monica French, said. "We know this song will make an impact."

"My Name is Christmas" was picked as the first single from the album "A Season of Hope," a collection of holiday songs made as a fundraising project by the non-profit Girls Against Abuse Foundation. It was released earlier this month and is being promoted to holiday music radio stations across the nation.

The song's lyrics are built around the theme of an "angel tree" at a shopping mall — a tree decorated with the names of needy children. The angel tree program encourages shoppers to choose a name and buy a gift to brighten the child's holiday.

Fetner said the idea of the song hit him about seven years ago when he and his wife were shopping at Patrick Henry Mall in Newport News.

"I was sitting there out in the hallway, like most husbands do," Fetner said. "My wife was going into a store and she said, 'Go pick a name off the tree.' That's what started it for me."

His song, originally titled "My Name is Justin," gives voice to several children whose names could have appeared on the tree. "I need a new coat and a warm pair of shoes, and maybe kids won't laugh when I go back to school," French sings. "I'm looking for an angel. Is that someone you know?"

The song reached producers of the "A Season of Hope" through a music publisher, so Fetner and Robynne French didn't work together directly. Fetner did customize the song's lyrics to make it work better for a 10-year-old girl.

Both songwriter and singer are excited by the possibilities of the new recording.

"I'm glad its being used for something so positive," Fetner said. "They're using the song to support their campaign, but if enough people hear it, maybe somebody will go by an angel tree and pick a name."

Robynne described the tune as a blessing.

"I'm not one of those kids who needs something," she said, "but it really did touch my heart. People are trying to help kids who are underprivileged.

"I really would hope that almost all of the kids on those trees would get at least one thing on their list and that people would go out and volunteer some of their time for those kids.

"I do, I love the song," Robynne said. "Sometimes, I almost cry singing it."

Find out more about "A Season of Hope" at www.thegirlsagainstabuse.com

Find out more about Ron Fetner at www.ronfetner.com

