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## Jael Gadsen takes a turn in the spotlight

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**Emily Chilton and Kristopher Kasik**, August 23. They live in Fairfax, Va., where she is an attorney and he attends George Washington University.

**Madeline Emily Clark and Robert Mavrogordato**, August 2. Madeline is pursuing a Ph.D. in education policy at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn., and Robert works in pharmaceutical sales.

**Elizabeth Gold Griffin and Brad Westbrook**, October 11. She is a social worker with the Forsyth County (Ga.) School System and he is co-founder of Catalyst Retail Group, a real estate brokerage company.

**Elizabeth McNeill and Tom Sherrard**, October 4. They live in Louisville, Ky.

**Sarah Katherine Swiger and Ryan Benjamin Lyford**, August 30. Katie is pursuing a master's degree in English through the Breadloaf School at Middlebury College in Vermont, and Ryan is employed with the U.S. Department of State Foreign Service. They live in Arlington, Va.

**BIRTH:** Clint and **Kelsey Ruebush Grant**, a son, Liam Vedder, May 8, Summerville, S.C.

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**Jay McKnight** of Greenville has become a commercial lines risk advisor at Assure-South Inc., an independent insurance agency.

**MARRIAGES:** **John Hunter Allen** and Kelly Ann Rentz, October 25. Kelly Ann is a registered nurse in the Greenville Hospital System and John is pursuing a Master of Arts degree in teaching from Clemson University.

**Heather Bauguess** and Mark Hearne Tucker, October 25. They live in Atlanta.

**Sara Blackburn Clark** and David Mark Perry, May 17. Both are fourth-year

students at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston. She is studying in the School of Pharmacy and he is in the M.D./Ph.D. program.

**Brian Joseph Fisher and Jessica Lauren Moore**, May 10. Both are in their third year at the University of South Carolina School of Law in Columbia.

**Jessica Erin Hawley** and David Nicholas Sharp, October 18. They live in Greenville. Jessica is completing her master's degree at Converse College and is employed by the YWCA. David is completing his bachelor's degree at the University of South Carolina-Upstate.

## JAEL GADSDEN TAKES A TURN IN THE SPOTLIGHT

For five years Jael Gadsden '01 had been living in Los Angeles, pursuing her dream of a career in music.

She'd enjoyed some limited success. While working at an ad agency, she'd picked up performing gigs in clubs and restaurants on nights and weekends. She'd written a number of songs and recorded "The Journey," a CD that is available on-line at <http://www.cdbaby.com/cd/jaelmusic>. She'd appeared in commercials and had a bit role in "American Dreamz," a 2006 film parody of "American Idol."

But all that paled in comparison to what happened last spring, when she was named the grand champion of the 2008 Lincoln Spotlight songwriting contest.

The competition invited people to create an original song and video promoting one of the luxury car's brand truths: "advancing the American dream, exploring what it means to reach higher, daring to do more and taking pride in one's history."

For Gadsden, the themes hit close to home. She says, "It gave me the opportunity to write about a topic I feel very strongly about."

Choosing an instrumental track from several provided by the contest sponsor, she penned an affirming, upbeat song titled "Your Season" and, with the help of friends from the ad agency, put together a video. She submitted her entry last February — then waited



Jael with Bilal (left) and Common in Chicago.

as the public voted on-line for their favorites. She remained in the running as the field of candidates was whittled to 20, 10 and, finally, to 5.

At that point industry judges stepped in to pick the winner.

In May, she got the call she'd hoped for. The award brought a \$10,000 prize, a featured video on [www.lincolnlounge.com](http://www.lincolnlounge.com), and an opening spot

at a 2008 performance by Grammy-winning, hip-hop superstar Common.

The big night came September 27 at a benefit concert at Chicago's House of Blues, where she hobknobbed with Common and other artists (Bilal, Wil.I.Am, Floetry), got the full red-carpet treatment, and sang "Your Season" before an appreciative audience. The scene was reminiscent of another moment seven years earlier, when she and three Furman classmates, who had a singing group called "Eboné," performed on "Showtime at the Apollo" at New York's famed Apollo Theatre.

Only this time it wasn't amateur night.

The House of Blues performance has brought Gadsden a good deal of press and a number of new contacts in the music industry. "It doesn't hurt to say that you've opened for someone like Common," she says. "And being able to write and perform your own material tends to make you stand out more."

As she discusses her plans, which include recording another CD, her voice exudes a quiet determination and a serene confidence that even greater success lies ahead. And if nothing else, the Lincoln Spotlight award has provided her the best opportunity yet to share her music with the world.

— JIM STEWART