

# The inspiration of the poets

Some of the lyricism of the great Romantic poets may have rubbed off on singer-songwriter Martin Longstaff, as **Ian McCabe** discovers

**F**or Martin Longstaff it's all in the name. Despite starting out as a solo act, Martin decided to perform under the pseudonym The Lake Poets in homage to 19th Century poets William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey.

"The Lake Poets were massively inspired by nature, particularly the beauty and tranquillity of the Lake District. I spent a lot of my youth in the Lake District and their writing resonates with me," Martin says. "I also chose my music to be released and performed under a band name because it meant that the music becomes the focus, not the person writing it."

Martin, 24, began writing music seriously after his grandfather died last year. "He meant an awful lot to me," he says. "His death made me realise that life is fleeting and you must strive to do what you love." For Martin, this meant picking up his acoustic guitar and writing heartfelt indie/folk songs with powerful hooks and delicate lyrics.

"My writing is inspired by what we all must go through in order to become successful adults in society's eyes. In other words, get a steady job, a house, a partner, and perhaps have children," states Martin.

"Achieving these things successfully is easier said than done and in doing so, perhaps we must leave a piece of ourselves behind as we get older."

Along the way, musicians and members of other local bands, impressed by what they heard, began to collaborate and soon enough The Lake Poets became a fully fledged band. Now, alongside Martin, are David Ellwood (bass guitar/banjo), Steven Calder (harmonica/mandolin), Daniel Laidler (drums/piano), Callum Hulsmeier (guitar) and Liam Longstaff (guitar/melodica).

The Lake Poets have quickly built up a cult following across the region and nationwide. And in a whirlwind 18 months together they have notched up highlights including supporting slots alongside Willy Mason and Ben Howard, selling out Newcastle's Cluny 2 and performing on the Greenpeace stage at Glastonbury.

"That was the overall highlight of my year," says a proud Martin. "To play such an established festival after only a year of making music was a great honour."

So far they have released two free to download EPs, a self-titled collection of demos and *Alter*, a selection of covers. "I made them available for free because I

wanted as many people as possible to hear my music," says Martin. "The covers demo is representative of my love for North East music. I called it *Alter* because all songs on the demo have been slightly altered. The cover versions are a sort of a thank you to the bands in question for simply being mint songwriters and inspirations of mine."

Martin comes from Sunderland and the region resonates in songs such as *Shipyards*, written for his grandfather. He says: "I am very grateful to the people from our region that come out to see us play and that tells me they like my songs. It means a lot to me and the lads."

"The current North East music scene is booming. I've seen a lot of bands this year and the vast majority I would very happily go out of my way to see again and support them all I can."

"The music coming from our region is so varied that it's obvious we all work very hard and think very carefully about our creative output. We don't follow trends and we get stuff done."

\* The Lake Poets perform at Newcastle's Head of Steam on December 3 and at Sunderland's Plugged Inn on December 23, [www.thelakepoets.com](http://www.thelakepoets.com)

