

MLP: FiM: Lower Deck Chronicles

Part 1: Bluenotes' Blues

"This has got to be the worst thing we've ever attempted," came the irritated voice of a young filly.

The complaining filly was Apple Bloom, a yellow earth pony with a puffy red mane and a bright red ribbon on her cress. She was currently hanging upside down from a tree branch, snagged there with two others. One was Sweetie Belle, a unicorn of a soft white colour with a mane of swirled pink and purple. The other was a bright orange pegasus named Scootaloo with a burgundy mane in a boyish style. All three of them were wearing helmets and appeared slightly singed.

"Okay, okay," said Scootaloo, working to get loose of the tree branch she was snagged on. "I guess Cutie Mark Crusader Cannonball ponies wasn't the greatest idea after all. You gotta admit though, that was awesome!"

"I still don't know where you managed to find that thing," remarked Sweetie Belle as she too tried to get down from the tree.

"Maybe we're going about the the wrong way," pondered Apple Bloom. With a firm tug, she finally managed to jerk the three of them loose from the tree branch. They then proceeded to fall to the ground in a heap. "Everything we try seems to end up blowing up in our face."

"Especially this time," commented Sweetie Belle, standing up in a daze.

"Well then what do you suggest?" demanded Scootaloo. "We've tried Cutie Mark Crusader carpenters, comedians, chicken catchers, cannonballs, and just about anything else we could think of."

"Maybe we need more information," suggested Sweetie Belle. "We asked my sister and her friends how they got their cutie marks, but they were the only ones. There are lots of other ponies in Ponyville who we didn't ask. I'm sure at least one of them went through the same kind of difficulties we did. If we can find someone who did, then maybe we can use their method."

"More stories?" groaned Scootaloo. "The last time we went looking for cutie mark stories, I nearly hurled from how sickeningly sweet they all were. Not to mention the singing. Can't we try something else? Something more exciting?"

"I'm with Sweetie Belle on this one," remarked Apple Bloom. "If we keep trying things at random, we're gonna keep ending up stuck in trees. Need I remind you of the zip lining?"

"Alright, alright. But no singing this time or I'm out."

"Deal."

The Cutie mark Crusaders picked themselves up and, after quickly tidying themselves, got underway. Scootaloo mounted her signature wooden scooter, while the other two hopped into the wagon attached to its rear. Scootaloo fluttered her wings rapidly, and they were off.

As the three of them headed towards town, they contemplated who they should ask for a cutie mark story. They had already heard from their Teacher, Cherrilee, Apple Bloom and Sweetie Belle's sisters Applejack and Rarity, Scootaloo's idol Rainbow Dash, Pinkie Pie, Fluttershy and Twilight Sparkle. They had also discussed cutie marks with their classmates not long after the formation of the Crusaders.

"So who are we going to talk to?" asked Apple Bloom as the three of them hurried towards the town proper.

"I dunno," replied Sweetie Belle. "Is there anypony's story in particular you wanted to hear?"

"I don't think any story can top Rainbow Dash's," remarked Scootaloo. "But I say we try hearing from somepony cool."

“Like who? We already heard from the coolest ponies in Ponyville.”

“How 'bout the colt who runs the music store? He seems like he'd be pretty cool.”

“That's not a bad idea. It might help Sweetie Belle too, since she's a pretty good singer.”

“Nah, that's only when I'm by myself. I can't sing in front of a crowd, and a real special talent should be something you can share. I don't mind asking him his story though.”

“That's as good a place t'start as any. Let's motor Scootie.”

“You got it.”

Scootaloo revved her wings faster and picked up the speed of her scooter. As they made their way into town, crowds of ponies veered away from the trio, notorious for their over abundance of energy and the mayhem they always seemed to bring with them. The Cutie Mark Crusaders came to a dead stop in front of the Ponyville music store, the sudden stop nearly throwing Apple Bloom and Sweetie Belle from the waggon.

The Cutie Mark Crusaders dismounted their vehicle and entered the store. They were greeted, albeit a bit reluctantly, by a soft blue colt with a deep blue mane. His flank was decorated by a pair of blue bar-notes. His name was Bluenotes, the owner and operator of the store. He seemed a bit hesitant around the fillies, who were known to be unpredictable.

“Hello girls,” said the store owner, treading carefully with his words.

“Hello Mr. Bluenotes,” chimed the three together.

“What can I help you girls with? Does your latest endeavour need some kind of musical accompaniment?”

“No,” replied Apple Bloom, “we're taking a bit of a break right now.”

“I see.” A soft sigh gave away Bluenotes' relief that the Cutie Mark Crusaders wouldn't be raiding his store. “That being the case, what can I do for you?”

“Actually we decided that before we try anything else, we should get some more information about cutie marks,” replied Sweetie Belle.

“In other words, we're looking for more cutie mark stories,” stated Scootaloo bluntly. “I suggested yours because I thought it would be a cool story to hear.”

“Oh? I supposed I can share my story; not much business going on today anyways.”

The three fillies seated themselves and listened intently to Bluenotes as he began his story. “I don't often talk about this, but I actually grew up in Manehattan. It wasn't until I grew up that I moved here to Ponyville.”

“Ooooh,” chimed the Crusaders.

“It's that not impressive really. Growing up in the city isn't exactly easy. My parents didn't really make a lot of money, so it was all we could do to make ends meet. This made it somewhat difficult for me to explore the possibilities of what my special talent was.”

“Uh-oh, my sappy sense is tingling,” remarked Scootaloo, before being shushed by the other Crusaders.

“However, there was one thing I always enjoyed, and that was music. Whether it was listening to ponies busking on the streets, browsing the different kinds of instruments in the nearby shops, or sampling music made by other popular pony musicians of the time.”

Young Bluenotes wandered through the streets of Manehattan, scampering around the feet of his parents. They smiled at him, pleased to see he was so energetic. He stopped for a moment when they came across a pony playing music on the street corner. He had constructed a one man band from a tuba, harmonic, cymbals, banjo and flute. When he finished playing, he pushed over a cap looking for donations. Sadly, all Bluenotes could do was shrug and show that he was just as strapped for cash as the busker.

“Although my parents wanted to be supportive, they couldn’t spare any money for me to explore my interest. So, I decided to start earning some money for myself doing odd jobs.”

Young Bluenotes departed from his home into the city in order to find some work. Throughout the course of his odd jobbing, he ran himself ragged doing anything he could for other ponies. However; he knew that a little hard work never hurt anypony and was always pleased to receive the pay for each little job. He kept it up for a while until he felt he had enough saved to finally take his interest off the ground.

Bluenotes made his way to the music store, where he was greeted by the older colt who ran the shop. He showed off his small pouch of money, but the store owner shook his head. “Sorry kiddo, but this isn’t enough for any new instrument.”

“Oh,” replied Bluenotes, hanging his head, feeling dejected. He turned and prepared to depart from the store.

“I can show you some of my used instruments if you’d like.”

Bluenotes turned to face the shop owner again, his interest piqued again. “Alright, that’d be fine I guess.”

The shop owner took Bluenotes over to a section filled with used instruments. They were all well maintained, although their wear and tear were still apparent. Bluenotes tried his hand at a chello, trombone, harp, flute, and even an accordion. None of them seemed to sound right to Bluenotes, but he couldn’t quite put his hoof on why. Although he loved listening to music, making it himself just didn’t seem to be working out. He was beginning to feel like he would never find his special talent.

The last thing Bluenotes came across in the store’s used section was an old mixing turntable. He hadn’t given a thought to mixing music before, so he decided to give it a shot. The owner of the store warned him that the old turntable might not work properly, but went ahead and set it up for him. Bluenotes took up his position at the turntable and began fiddling with it. Despite trying various techniques, adjusting different knobs and dials, he just couldn’t produce something he liked. He sighed and stepped away from the turntable, ready to leave the store.

As Bluenotes was about to leave the store, another customer came in. She was a white unicorn whose mane and tail were streaked with light and dark shades of blue. She wore a pair of pink tinted sunglasses and her flank was decorated with a single black bar note. Vinyl Scratch, an up and coming young mixing musician and DJ had just walked into the same music store as Bluenotes. His jaw nearly hit the floor.

“Yo pops,” said Vinyl, addressing the shop owner. “I was in the market for a new turntable, and was lookin’ to see if anypony’s got somethin’ I dig.”

“Of course Ms. Scratch, I have some new Magnacalts that just came in.”

“Hold up, what about that one what’s already set up?”

“I’m not sure that one would be to your liking Ms. Scratch; it’s an old, used model.”

“Ain’t nothin’ wrong with old hardware. Even I started off with a beat up old P0n-3 single

disk.”

“If you insist Ms. Scratch.”

Bluenotes, who had reneged on his decision to leave the store, watched intently as Vinyl Scratch took up her place behind the turntable that he had abandoned. Her horn lit up with a magical glow, causing the lights of the store to dim. A pair of search lights shone out from somewhere behind her. She placed a hoof on each disk of the turntable and began to run the tracks. Using the magic from her horn, she manipulated the dials and switches while scratching the records manually. Bluenotes was awestruck at the kind of sound she was able to produce with that beat up old turntable. He hadn’t been able to make anything close to what he was hearing.

“Now that’s what I’m talkin’ about,” said Vinyl, finishing up her sampling of the turntable and setting the lighting of the store back to normal. “I’ll take it.”

“I was shocked at the spectacle of her performance, especially considering I hadn’t been able to produce anything remotely pleasant to listen to. I wanted more. Instead of buying an instrument for myself, I rushed out of the store and grabbed a ticket to Vinyl’s next show with the money I had saved.”

Although the venue itself wasn’t very large, the presence of Vinyl Scratch pushed the demand off the map. Bluenotes had been lucky to procure a ticket at all. It was set in a small club and there were only a couple hundred ponies there. Despite this, the energy in the atmosphere was almost tangible. When the lights finally went down and the show started, the cheers that everypony let out nearly drowned out the sound coming from the stage.

There she was, in the middle of the stage. Vinyl Scratch stood amidst a couple other ponies playing different instruments, and another providing vocals. The lighting of the show was even more intense than the small demonstration Vinyl had done by herself when sampling the turntable. The turntable itself was almost unrecognizable, having been repaired and repainted since Vinyl had bought it. Between the other performers, the light show and the overall atmosphere, Bluenotes got the ‘more’ that he had wanted and then some.

At the end of the show, the cheering persisted for almost a full half hour before the crowd began to disperse. A few stuck around to try and talk to the musicians, including Bluenotes. A few autographs were handed out, but most of the musicians seemed to simply want to leave. Bluenotes felt like he wouldn’t be able to get in and tell Vinyl how inspired he was by her performance. Then, when the fanponies were dispersing, Vinyl spotted Bluenotes.

“Hey kid,” she said, taking Bluenotes by surprise. “I remember you. You were at the store the day I picked up my turntable.”

“Um, yeah...” managed Bluenotes, still somewhat shocked that he had been recognized. “Hi.”

“I take it you liked the show?”

“Yes! It was the most amazing thing I’ve ever seen!” Bluenotes blushed a little when he realized he was gushing.

Vinyl seemed amused by Bluenotes more than anything. “Glad you liked it; ain’t nothing better than knowing the people listenin’ like what we do up there. You actually remind me of myself a little; although I guess I’m not *that* much older than you.”

Vinyl Scratch flicked her horn, which lit up with magical light. From someplace nearby, the turntable from the shop Bluenotes had visited floated towards the two of them. A marker floated up and scrawled Vinyl’s autograph on the face of the turntable. She then flicked her horn again, setting the hovering turntable on Bluenotes back. He bore an expression of pure shock at what she had just done.

“That’s for you kid; When the time comes, I hope you share what you love with those around you.”

“In that moment, it all became clear to me.”

Bluenotes stood silently in shock for a moment, allowing his thoughts to straighten out. He realized what had been missing. He had been passionate, but he had only been thinking of pursuing it for himself. Vinyl had shown him that the true power of one's passions comes when you can share it with others. Bluenotes felt his flank tingle, and looked back to see it flash momentarily. The image of two dark blue bar notes appeared there. Vinyl smirked when she saw this, pleased to see the young colt had gained something from her gesture.

Bluenotes gestured to the notes decorating his flank; “That's when these appeared. I later moved here and opened this music shop so I could share my passion with lots of other ponies. I still have that old turntable somewhere in the back and use it to mix some music of my own.”

“Wow,” remarked Apple Bloom, “that was a great story.”

“Yeah,” chimed in Sweetie Belle. “Being able to share your talent with everyone is what really makes it special.”

“I'm just glad that for a pony who likes music, we didn't have to put up with any singing,” added Scootaloo. “Still, that was pretty cool, for somepony who isn't Rainbow Dash that is.”

The other two snickered at Scootaloo's fanatic devotion to the older pegasus as they made their way out of the store. Bluenotes saw them off, a smile on his face stemming both from sharing his story and the lack of damage caused by the normally rambunctious trio. The three of them donned their helmets once again as they took their places on the waggon and scooter.

“So,” said Scootaloo, revving up her wings, “where to next?”

Author's Notes: While I'm aware that there are a lot of background ponies more popular (and well known) than Bluenotes, he was the first one whose story fleshed itself out in my mind. For those who enjoyed this, fear not, for I intend to do more with more popular background ponies. For those who don't, sorry it wasn't to your liking. Hopefully my attempt at emulating the cut away style featured in the show works out.

P.S: The title of this story is a reference to the Star Trek: Next Generation Episode 'Lower Decks', where background characters get their day in the limelight.