

# Alumni, students rock toward record deal



Jake Valente, Michael Lobacz, Frank Hurd and Ben Soldate plan to release their self-produced first EP on Tuesday, Dec. 13 at the Fat Frogg.

Rebecca Wickel  
Design Editor

Studying for exams, purchasing textbooks and scrambling to finish papers are typical parts of a college student's life. But for some, additional responsibilities include writing songs, recording music and playing gigs.

Phoenix Highway, an eclectic ensemble formed on Elon University's campus, has been preparing for the release of its debut album, "American Blend," available Tuesday, Dec. 13.

"We're excited about it," said senior Frank Hurd. "What we think is really cool is that it encompasses a lot of styles, like rock, acoustic, soul and country."

Hurd met Jacob Danieleley, class of 2010, and Michael Lobacz, class of 2011, in 2009, when the three were part of the Elon Electric Ensemble. After playing together and exploring interests, the musicians discovered common sources of inspiration, including The Beatles and The Eagles.

"We really respect what they do so much," Lobacz said. "That's where a lot of our music comes from, trying to emulate their work, but not imitate it."

Influenced by the harmonies and songwriting of what Hurd calls "great bands of the past," the three teamed up with junior Ben Soldate in spring 2010 and were joined most recently by freshman Jake Valente.

With a solid foundation, the group is moving on to bigger things. Hurd said the band has been looking to play more venues outside Elon, expand its fan base in number and location and talk with Redlight Records about a management deal.

Phoenix Highway has been talking about commercials, TV shows and movies, hoping to build a following that can support its passion.

"When we get enough momentum to get rolling and get the CD out there, we're going to be looking at something great," Hurd said.

The men of Phoenix Highway have a lot to be proud of.

"As music technology majors we did everything for this album ourselves," Lobacz said. "We put in a lot of time, which helps with the end product because we were exposed from beginning to end."

Hurd said he believes the band's role in producing, writing, mixing and performing its music commands

a certain respect that will hopefully translate into fans.

"There's so few people that write their own music and do it all themselves," Hurd said. "We did it all, and maybe people will be encouraged to support us and come see us live."

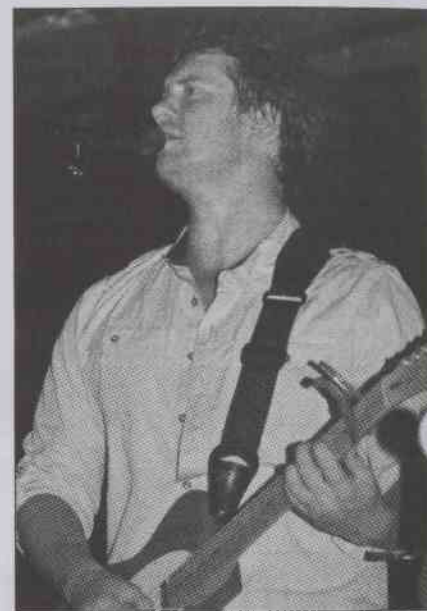
Although the bandmates are welcoming success, they have faced challenges balancing responsibilities as students, family members and musicians.

"Some of the guys are still in school so it's hard to find time to practice," Lobacz said. "Jacob is starting a family but when we're on the road with the band, it's hard."

Despite obstacles, fans continue to support the band's work and look to the future.

"This band is made up of some very talented musicians from the drummer all the way to the lead singer," said fan and senior Ned Cuthbertson. "I would definitely recommend seeing them perform before you graduate, so in a few years when they get big, you can say you watched and listened to them before they got famous."

Phoenix Highway will be performing Dec. 7 at College Taphouse, and Dec. 13 at the Fat Frogg.



FILE PHOTOS BY BRIAN ALLENBY  
Top: Senior Frank Hurd sings and taught himself to play both guitar and piano. Middle: Singer and guitarist Jacob Danieleley performs at the Fat Frogg. Above: Michael Lobacz performs on the guitar and graduated in 2010.

## Senior saxophonists prepare for careers in music

Samuel Davis  
Reporter

The smooth sounds of saxophone notes are familiar to two seniors concentrating in the woodwind. Jon Moore, a performance major, and Nathan Thomas, a music education major, have been coaxing jazzy tunes out of their horns since before they enrolled at Elon University.

Their first encounter was four years ago in Elon's marching band, the Fire of the Carolinas, when Moore played tuba and Thomas played euphonium.

"We met each other outside of what we usually play, in the low brass section of marching band," Thomas said. "But as we talked we quickly discovered that we both were actually saxophone players. We've been friends ever since, being together in the studio."

In middle school, Moore and Thomas both began their band careers. Moore started on tenor sax and Thomas on clarinet. Moore played in his high school's saxophone quartet called Sax in the City.

"What is really cool about

that is that every person who played in that quartet went on to major in music in college," Moore said.

He went to his state's governor's school his junior and senior year, where he and several others formed a ska band, Corporate Fandango, that has lasted to this day. The band has made a name for itself in the underground ska scene, performing with groups such as Holy Ghost Tent Revival. At Elon, Moore is involved in a saxophone quartet, a touring ensemble, jazz ensemble and marching band, along with Corporate Fandango.

"My days are always very full but it never really seems like that much to me simply because I very much enjoy everything I'm doing with music," Moore said.

Thomas is also heavily involved, performing in sax quartet, jazz ensemble, marching band, percussion ensemble, chorale and orchestra.

An important experience Moore and Thomas shared was the European tour the jazz ensemble took two years ago. It was an 11-day journey through

Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands. The group acted as jazz ambassadors, bringing American music to European countries.

"There really isn't very much music that we can call completely American, but with jazz, it really is like we are bringing our own national culture to people with a limited exposure to it," Thomas said.

The ensemble played in many different locations, ranging from a gazebo by the street in Germany a crowd of 5,000 in Scheveningen.

After college, both Moore and Thomas anticipate going to graduate school. Thomas hopes to teach high school music, getting his foot in the door to eventually study music therapy in graduate school.

"I hope to help children with disorders," Thomas said. "Down's, Asperger's, it doesn't matter what. I just know music has a power that can help struggling kids in so many ways."

He said he hopes to continue playing the saxophone in community bands wherever he goes.

Moore plans to continue

playing with Corporate Fandango, which is planning some big upcoming tours, bringing in money to help with the costs of grad school.

"Everyone wants to play for a living," Moore said. "You have to expect things to not go, as well as you would like while still remaining optimistic that things might just go well."

They both said their personal inspiration is listening to other students. Whenever they get discouraged they will listen around in the practice area



MOLLY CAREY | Staff Photographer  
Nathan Thomas performed his senior recital Wed., Nov. 30.

where they can hear at least one other student continually working hard. They said this brings them motivation to keep playing.