

# Features



Dave Simón, Elizabeth Laird, and Beyond Joy are members of the Pagan group.

## A profile: The Pagan Mysticism Group

Donion Moore  
STAFF WRITER

"Paganism is more of a way of life," said Elizabeth Laird, Guilford sophomore and one of the founders of the Pagan Mysticism Group.

Laird, as well as many other students on campus, openly practices one of many forms of Paganism.

One club member defined Paganism as "Earth-ven-erating belief systems, which believe in the existence of a natural force called magick as well as the human ability to make use of magick. Most forms of paganism are poly-theistic. However, not all Pagans believe in many deities or any deities. Like Christianity, Paganism has many different paths. Unlike Christianity, the various paths of Paganism do not share belief in a common deity. Paganism is a positive, self-reflective religion. I think spirituality, religion, and the way I live my life are far too integrated to separate."

The group currently has around 20 members. It developed over the course of the semester through the concerns and interests of its members. Membership is open to all interested members of the Guilford College community regardless of religious practice.

They meet at the Hut on Wednesdays at 9:00 p.m. and have tea, lectures, and discus-

sions on Pagan issues and upcoming fall semester events. The group also plans to work in partnership with other groups in the area that share similar interest.

They hope to soon be recognized as an official club by getting their constitution passed through the student senate.

According to Guilford junior Beyond Joy, also a group member and founder, "The central purpose of the Pagan Mysticism Group is to provide a pagan religious organization for the student body of Guilford College and a source of religious diversity. In doing so we hope to promote social justice, religious tolerance, and pagan awareness. We intend to offer education to the greater Guilford community regarding, paganism, general mysticism, environmentalism, and magick theory."

Laird stated, "We are active in community service with the intent of improving the Guilford College community in addition to the greater community as a whole."

If you would like to know more about Paganism, there are several websites that offer accurate information, two suggested by the group members are [www.witchvox.com/basics/wfaq.html](http://www.witchvox.com/basics/wfaq.html) and [witchsweb.com](http://witchsweb.com). If you would like to talk to a group member you can contact Elizabeth Laird at x3538.

LEAH KEPALOS

## Muzak Theorists: Softward

Hunter Bowen  
STAFF WRITER

"It's more like a direction than a place for crazy people," explains Guilford senior Marc Bernstein of the name Softward — the band he formed with fellow Guilfordians Kevin Holmes and Nabil Ahmed three years ago.

As Holmes recounts, "I thought of nothing for two weeks but possible band names, none of which anyone liked...then one evening Nabil stepped onto the front porch where we were relaxing with friends and rolls out 'Softword,' and everyone just

n o d d e d  
c o o l l y  
i n  
a g r e e m e n t."

At this, Ahmed adds t h a t Bernstein immediately amended the name to "Softward."

T h i s  
k i n d  
o f  
i n t e r  
a c t i o n  
a m o n g  
t h e  
t h r e e  
i s  
c o m m o n.

In fact, it occurs to me during the interview, all three seated on a couch in their Softloft — the band's home studio

— that this is just how they create their music. One introduces a phrase or melody to the other two, the other two run with it. In the end; what started out as a simple melodic idea of one member becomes a magnum opus of the trio. Although, as they admit, Ahmed and Holmes are the primary songwriters, Bernstein provides most of the rhythm.

The collaboration of the three began in 1997 with their infamous Muzak Theory show on WQFS. The show not only showcased their musical inspirations — which range from post-rock, avant-garde electronica, and kraut rock to '70s prog rock, punk rock and metal — but served as a musical experiment of sorts with the three stringing together two hours worth of material as one piece of music. Often they played more than one piece at a time, perhaps mixing and scratching spoken word or German polka albums over Kraftwerk.

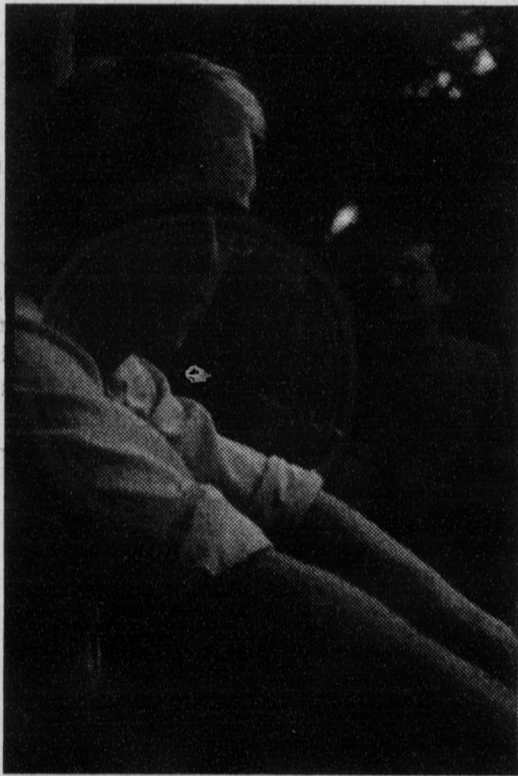
In the spring of 1999, they de-

cided to take their experiment out of WQFS and play live with instruments for Serendipity. Performing as the Muzak Theory Ensemble before a packed Leak Room audience, they played an hour-long, improvised set to a film they had made and edited a week earlier.

"We were bored with only using drums, bass, and a guitar to make music," explains Ahmed, "so we explore other instruments and noise makers and even switch up instruments among one another during the writing and performance of songs."

The following spring, after a nine-month hiatus, the three con-

vened again with the addition of pal N a t h a n Stambaugh to put together another Serendipity performance, this time as Softward and with pre-written, more structured songs as well as a n o t h e r film. "We refined and restrained ourselves," says Holmes of their sound. "We don't like to shoot



The boys of the band.

things out of our amps."

Since that show, the band's fan base has grown significantly as they have played more frequently in the area. Last summer Softward released a four-song demo CD on their own (available at Gate City Noise). It has traveled far and wide since then, landing in the hands of some important people in the indi-rock world. In June, Softward plans to record with Matt Clark of Joan of Arc in New York City, an enormous boost for the band. According to Bernstein, they have 15 -20 songs ready to record.

Aside from a full-length album and several gallery shows in the works, Softward hopes to continue making music as diligently and as creatively as ever. "We live together, so we play as much as possible," say the boys, "but more than anything we want to share with people in the area and beyond just what can be done and is done with music when you use your imagination."