



Three Quarter Moon Releases Album

A SENIOR PROJECT CREATES OPPORTUNITY FOR A YOUNG BLUEGRASS BAND

By Sarah Zobel

At noon on most Wednesdays last year, Sol Chase '15, Hannah Merrill '15 and Erica McCormick '16 would grab their instruments — a mandolin, a banjo and a guitar — and head for the basement of Phillips Church, where they would join banjo player and English Instructor Todd Hearon.

The informal ensemble, who called themselves Banjo'clock, would jam for an hour or so before the three students continued on their own to rehearse covers and original songs for their bluegrass and folk band, Three Quarter Moon, which had a standing gig at the Exeter Inn from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. those evenings.

Chase, who plays the mandolin, says that ultimately Three Quarter Moon's music "flowed over into every free period, lunch and just kind of all of our free time." It was, adds guitarist McCormick, "just nonstop playing in different locations."

After 25 hours in a Portsmouth recording studio as part of Chase's senior project, advised by Hearon, the trio has released an album, *Southbound*. It includes 10 original songs and was celebrated at a crowded release party in Phillips Church in early June. This summer, the band will be touring the Colorado music festival circuit to promote the new album.

During one of their last days on campus together, the band answered a few questions.

Q: How was the band formed?

Erica McCormick: Sol and I have been playing together since upper spring, and I gave Hannah a banjo I had — she was playing harp. When we came back this year, we decided to be a band. We came up with our name over Christmas break.

Sol Chase: After throwing out 4,000 others.

EM: I was sitting at my farm — I live on a horse farm in Texas. We were all on the phone constantly because we had a new gig at the Exeter Inn that we needed to have a band name for, so we had a really big time crunch. I was looking at the moon, and I thought, *How would I measure how far away the moon appears to be from the trees?* And for

some reason my brain jumped to distances measured in quarters — as in the currency — and I thought, *It's about two quarters away.* I said that to them, and they said, "What about three?"

Q: Who are your musical influences?

EM: We kind of got obsessed with the Punch Brothers — especially Sol, who's always been a huge fan of theirs — and Gillian Welch and Dave Rawlings, from whom we took numerous harmonies to fit in the spaces of our album. Also there's a new Punch Brothers album called *The Phosphorescent Blues*, which is really odd. It's got kind of a new type of bluegrass on it and it's a very experimental sound. We didn't want to do something that was just another folk album, or just another bluegrass album, but something different that might not even have a genre yet.

Q: What were the recording sessions like?

Hannah Merrill: It was a really interesting experience. For me, it was almost as if that was the first time I had heard our songs, and I was processing them differently, I think. I liked them a lot better after that too!

EM: We can play covers from the Rolling Stones and hate them after we play them five or six times, so you completely expect to hate your own songs when you play them repeatedly. But I think we really connected more than ever with our music and with each other during our studio time.

SC: We did it at a local studio in Portsmouth called Mill Pond Music Studio. The founder's named is James Prendergast. He was a musician in Nashville for 20 or 30 years, so he really had the knowledge to make the best quality product we could hope for anywhere outside of Nashville or Austin.

EM: We made all the money we've used on this entire project ourselves at the Exeter Inn. We're completely self-funded — and funded from music.

Q: Sol and Erica, you've been playing your instruments for many years, but Hannah, you're pretty new to banjo.

HM: I've been playing since last March. Erica convinced me to play, and I took banjo lessons with Adjunct Music Instructor Ryan Thompson. He plays claw hammer style, and I do a little bit of that and finger picking — those are the two main styles. Most of my practice comes from Banjo'clock and band practice.

EM: I think Hannah could play pretty much any instrument.

SC: It's kind of scary, actually. She'll pick up a mandolin or guitar and be better than us at a certain song in a couple of hours.

Q: But you don't sing?

HM: No. I don't enjoy it very much, and I love hearing Sol and Erica sing and don't want to interfere with that.

SC: Aw!

Q: Was this the first time writing music and lyrics for all of you?

EM: Sol and I both have notebooks full of songs we've written, and some of those we play together. But this was the first time we'd done it seriously and compiled a number of songs that we all enjoyed. I think usually when you write songs, you end up liking them or not liking them, but I feel like I rarely ever finish them to a point that I would want to present them to a manufacturer. That was one of the hardest parts — getting our songs

to completion, past the *This is OK I guess* stage. Sol and I wrote some songs last year too, before we even thought of the senior project idea, but the senior project is a way to do that more efficiently.

SC: I did an extra format on day three and Erica and Hannah contributed out of their really busy schedules. It was officially just my senior project, but they did just as much work. Usually Erica and I would write a song, and then we'd bring it to Hannah. A couple of them — they're noted on the album — Hannah wrote with us, so we would just pass around a notebook and write down lyrics. And we wrote all the music and lyrics and solos and everything ourselves. It took a significant amount of time — that was probably where most of our time this term was spent: writing.

Q: Did it get in the way of academics?

EM: It's a priority for us.

SC: I'm going to UT-Austin next year, and Erica and I are planning to go into music as a business together, so I kind of thought of it as getting a head start on a career. That's probably just as important as that math test.

HM: I'm going to Cornell to study agriculture. My main goal is to take over my family's dairy farm that we've had for four generations in Stratham, but I'd love to try music at least for a little bit after college. ■

BREAKING NEW GROUND FOR THE MUSIC DEPARTMENT

May 14, 2015 was a momentous day as the PEA community gathered to break ground at the site of the new addition to the Forrestal-Bowld Music Center. The 12,000-square-foot expansion, which has a target opening of fall 2016, will include a 250-seat recital and rehearsal hall and a media and technology center. A music studio, Harkness classroom, rehearsal hall and practice rooms are also planned.

The morning's speakers included trustees, faculty and students, who laid out a vision for the performing arts at Exeter and spoke of the impact the addition would have on the Music Department's ability to meet the needs of its rapidly expanding program. Audrey Hood '17 spoke eloquently of Forrestal-Bowld as her "home on campus," a place in which "unlimited learning" occurs and "one of the biggest and most passionate communities on campus" thrives. She expressed appreciation for the new center, which will, in her words, "further our musical interests, enhancing and strengthening our community even more."

Expressing gratitude for the generosity of the donors who made the addition possible, Principal Tom Hassan

Clint Gilbert '47, Dudley Rauch '59, William Bowld '43, Principal Tom Hassan, Ann Goldstein W'53, R.C. McShane '17, Jeff Wood '59, Gro Wood and Jerry Sullivan.



called the performing arts an essential part of the Exeter experience, stating, "Music has the power to change a mood, lift our spirits and inspire the imagination."

PEA's Chamber Orchestra and Concert Choir, performing works by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and John Philip Sousa, provided "tangible examples," in Hassan's words, "of the incredible impact the expansion will have on these students, and on the thousands of other student musicians who will practice, perform — and discover — within the walls of the new addition." ■