

ZBT Trio is ready to take on the world

By Randi Atwood

Special to the Democrat

Zach Bartholomew began playing the piano around age 10, starting piano lessons because his younger sister wanted them. Though he liked practicing and playing for himself, he found that performing for people was stressful and nerve-wracking.

"I didn't even like to play in front of my parents," he remembers. "We had an old upright piano that I'd practice on and they'd hear me and that was OK, but if people came over to the house and Mom or Dad would say, 'Play something!' I never wanted to. I'd get stage fright."

He's gotten over his fear. Bartholomew, now 26, has been playing in public — making a living at it, in fact — for the last five years.

Until he was about 16, music was simply a hobby. But the summer before his senior year in high school, he attended FSU's summer jazz camp.

"It changed everything for me," says Bartholomew. "That's when I really learned about jazz. I took history and theory classes, and I got to see the faculty perform. That was like magic, what they were able to do."

He began studying with FSU's Bill Peterson, driving an hour each way from his home in Sopchoppy for each session, splitting the cost of lessons with his mother. When it came time for college, he chose music over engineering.

"I really like math and science, and I'm good at it, but I enjoy music more," he says. "I knew I could make more money in engineering, and I know I'd have to work hard to make a living in music, but I'd rather pursue something I really love than be someone who just gets a job."

Through school and after graduation, Bartholomew played gigs around town, putting together a jazz trio with Miles Bozeman on drums and Brandon Robertson on bass. At first, the three of them looked at the trio as a temporary



The Zach Bartholomew Trio has condensed its name to ZBT Trio and will play Saturday as part of the city's Sizzlin' Saturdays Concert Series. SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT

thing, a way to make a little money. But after playing together on a Mediterranean cruise in 2010, they decided that as a band, they wanted to get serious.

In recognition of the equal contributions of the three members of the trio, the group has changed its name from the Zach Bartholomew Trio to ZBT.

"We've grown so much together, and people just started calling us that, so that's what we go by now," explains Bartholomew. "Sometimes you hear bands and all their music sounds the same, because the same person writes it all. But we have three different people all contributing material. We're all classically trained jazz musicians, but we each bring our own personality to the music."

ZBT calls itself a "modern piano trio that is heavily influenced by jazz," but Bartholomew says they also draw a great deal from other genres of modern music. In 2011 the trio began writing songs for its first CD, which they recorded

in February 2012 and released in June.

The group paid for the studio time and the actual recording of the CD themselves. In order to raise money for the rest of the expenses — primarily mixing and mastering — Bartholomew started a Kickstarter campaign. They ended up raising about \$2,000 over a period of 60 days. Those funds also paid for the manufacture of 1,000 CDs.

"I'm one of those weird guys who still likes to buy CDs," says Bartholomew. "I love going to used CD stores and just poking around. And I like having the physical copy — reading the liner notes, seeing what the musicians had to say about the album, and looking at the artwork and the photography."

Though the CD is called "Out of This Town," (currently available on cdbaby.com and soon to be available on Amazon and iTunes), Bartholomew says emphatically that the title is not a criticism of Tallahassee or its music scene.

"I love Tallahassee. I've

been here a long time and there are great places to play here, but if we really want to have a career as a band, we can't just play in Tallahassee," he explains. "We want to start touring around Europe, hit the jazz festival circuit. It's a balance. We have a great following here and we want to continue to play here, but we also want to find places to play outside."

The challenge, he says, is

IF YOU GO

What: Sizzlin' Saturdays Concert Series featuring ZBT Trio

When: 6 to 8 p.m. Saturday

Where: Kleman Plaza Amphitheatre

Cost: Free

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that self-employed independent artists need to do everything themselves.

"It's basically running your own business, and that's how you have to treat it," he says. "It's so much more than just playing music."

Bartholomew does all the booking for the group, plus maintains their e-mail list, deals with the press, does all the band's social media, and created and maintains the band's website. He also has to stay in touch with his distributors to restock CDs, and do dozens of other tasks to keep the group running.

"I designed the actual album cover, wrote the liner notes, edited the photos and made an electronic press kit," he lists. "I also designed and mailed the invitations for the CD release party and have been trying to get people to review the album. That's all in the mornings. In the afternoons I teach and at night I have gigs or rehearsals."

"It would be nice if I could just write songs and practice and play music all the time, but that's not how it works."



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