



The members of Beloved Devotion: (left to right) Tyler Newman, Christopher Balkanski, Anthony Chavez, James Newman

BELOVED DEVOTION

Written by Maxine Martinez

In a small theater nestled in the back of Cap City Video Lounge, the four members of Beloved Devotion played a show where passion and expression took on just as much importance as the music.

I first met the group a few days prior for an interview. As we talked they regaled me with stories of shows where, as James Haskett (rhythm guitar and vocals) described, people “danced crazily,” moshed, and occasionally threw a few punches. But from those first few minutes in the venue, I knew that the

vat Cap City would show an alternative view to the alternative music scene. The movie theater/video rental store had the charm of an old Blockbuster with the comfort of a hip coffee house. In the back room, as Beloved Devotion made the final preparations on their instruments and mics, small groups of people sat chatting or watching the “Princess Bride” that played silently on a large screen. When the first few notes rang through the air, they were loud enough to penetrate through our bright orange earplugs. The music, as Christopher Balkanski (lead guitarist) described, was “raw, heavy, and

energetic.” Enough to get everyone in the crowd's attention and interest. What set the band apart from other heart-pounding performances was the fervor with which they played. It bought out the same passion within the listeners, many of whom began to stand and dance at the front of the room. In between songs, Anthony Chavez (frontman and bass) stopped to ask the intimate gathering of people to share their names and then introduced himself and the rest of the band, including Tyler Newman (drums). When the performance began again, the group in the theater had transformed from strangers to participants in a shared moment.

The band's ability to induce its audience into a moment of freedom, or release as some of the bandmates describe, comes from the members' own trust in each other. On stage, the group reacts to one another, sharing smiles or calling each other out, a similar banter that takes form in their conversations. During the performance, as Anthony made his way throughout the theater strumming wildly to James singing, he stomped, jumped, and joined in with the listeners dancing. Other members like Chris grew more serious as his fingers moved faster against the guitar. James closed his eyes and threw his whole body into every line, while Tyler pounded against the drums with so much passion that the threat of a broken stick loomed near. While no punches (luckily) were thrown in the comforting atmosphere of the lounge, it still reminded me of a sentiment that Chris shared, “I feel like that's what the scene has been missing. An excuse to go feral. I mean that's what our music is about. That's what we do.

We go ballistic. And we hope that energy is reciprocated as well.”

This scene Chris was referring to falls widely into the label of alternative. The term implies something that is out of the mainstream, but after witnessing the varying interest of the bandmates (including but not limited to Dungeons & Dragons, skateboarding, and spirituality) along with their range of personalities, it was not difficult to deduce that alternative provides the covering to delve into many interests. It's something that



Christopher (left), age 22, is a theater major attending Tallahassee Community College (TCC).

Anthony (right) is 22 and is pursuing a masters in social studies education at Florida State University (FSU)

It's something that allows the band to play with their experimental sound. It's like a spectrum kinda,” Anthony explains to me, “you have harder sounds on one side and something softer on the other. Chris and I usually lean into that harder sound while Tyler and James go for the softer.” This collection of sounds also

impacts the covers they play, which the band has to rely on as they add to their list of three original songs. They play a range of music from Red Hot Chilly Peppers, Nirvana, and even Katy Perry.



James , 19, is majoring in history at TCC

The versatility of the term is also seen in the varying venues in which the band plays. Tyler described that the “scene varies depending on the venue because some are more up in your face while others are more laid-back.” They’ve found that certain venues will attract certain types of listeners, but the common thread between them is the music and how it makes them feel. This level of connection between bandmates and the audience is often seen in bands that have been playing together for a long period, yet Beloved Devotion has only been together for a few months now.

When Anthony first arrived in Tallahassee this August, he knew he

wanted to start a band but did not realize how quickly things would align. He became acquainted with James early into his time here. “If you know anything about music, you know that finding someone who is a good drummer, and has their own set, is extremely rare,” described Anthony. The pair started to learn songs together but searching for a guitarist only yielded prospects who were unable to commit to the demands of being in a band.

Fortunately, in December, the Tallahassee Community College’s theater would provide two necessary components to the band’s formation: it allowed James to connect with Chris, and a mutual friend offered to let the trio play the theater show’s after-party. That set was the first time members James and Chris performed onstage and offered a glimpse of that “godlike” feeling the boys report experiencing on stage. However, it was after this moment that James began to make the transition from drums to vocals and guitar, leaving the trio to search for a fourth member.



Tyler , 18, is majoring in commercial music at FSU

It was a few days prior to winter break when James and Anthony took a trip to Guitar Center, where they ended up leaving with a few new guitar picks and a prospect. They describe witnessing “a tall lanky dude going crazy on the drums.” The three exchanged information, but it wasn’t until they all returned to their hometown area of South Florida that they played their first show together as a group. By the time they arrived again in Tallahassee for the spring semester, they were officially members of Beloved Devotion.

There can be no explicable reason for why these four people were able to meet, their continued pursuit can only be a response to a single shared sentiment amongst the members: they all want to be in a band. It is this desire that allows the members to be so devoted to their craft and put in hours of practice a week, a time which they’ve decided to double in preparation for an upcoming Battle of the Bands competition. The performance, taking place on April 14th, will mark their biggest one-to-date, and with a \$500 cash prize and studio time at stake, the boys expressed a feeling of nerves and excitement. “Although” James mentioned, “it feels good that we’re going in with the largest following on social media.” It’s an accomplishment they were proud to say was the result of Anthony, whom they described as having created a brand for them. The competition could only be entered after winning a bracket-style competition on social media where followers chose which bands they wanted to compete in. Anthony’s work paid off when they received the largest amount of votes. However, this does not change the nature of the band. In Cap City Video Lounge, before the band’s performance,

another group played and I watched as the members of Beloved Devotion filed into the room and began to dance and shout in support of their fellow musicians. Although the Battle of the Bands will be their first competition, the band members seem to agree that supporting other artists is as important as winning.

In the first few months since Beloved Devotion’s creation, the band has managed to acquire a steadily-rising level of success. As they continue to define their genre and carve out their space in the music scene, they try not to dwell on what the future holds or what success should look like. Taking it day by day they’ve adapted to a new shared sentiment: they want to play in a band together.