

# Pitching their talent

By Nishat Fatima  
THE BATTALION

In 1998, 13-year-old Erin Weidower was a member of the masses who were smitten with Fastball, a pop/rock trio that had colorful tunes and witty lyrics and seemed to come from out of nowhere.

Fastball was different from anything else that was on the music scene at the time, said Weidower, a freshman wildlife and fisheries sciences major.

"It was great to see a rock group that was thoughtful but didn't take themselves so seriously," Weidower said. "They were just the thing for people who were sick of listening to overbearing pop acts like Robyn and Jamiroquai that were really big at the time."

Fastball has been one of the most memorable mainstream rock acts to surface out of Austin in the past few years. Its colorful and perky brand of music struck a chord with America in 1998 when its No. 1 hit single "The Way" helped catapult the sales of its second album, "All the Pain Money Can Buy," to more than one million. It even landed the band two 1998 Grammy nominations, according to fastball.com. After recent lineup and label changes, Fastball is trying a new musical formula.

Tony Scalzo is one of the founding members of Fastball. Along with playing guitar and creating most of the band's lyrics, Scalzo shares vocalizing duties with co-founder Miles Zuniga.

"I am doing many dates throughout the country this spring. These days Miles and I have done many shows as an acoustic duo," Scalzo said. "This has proven to be a fun and economical way for us to get our music out to people. We did the eastern part of the country back in February and now we're off to the west. We travel in my car and it's just a lot of fun."

Scalzo said complete band performances are also in store for the band.

"We will be doing shows as a full band on various dates throughout 2003," he said. Kevin McKinney of Austin band Soulhat will augment the lineup on lead guitar.

From local underground music to traditional Indian Scalzo, the Fastball clan has been expanding its musical taste.

"Since we have been doing a lot of traveling in my car, I get to make the call of what we lis-

ten to," Scalzo said with a laugh. "Lately I have been listening to a lot of Bob Dylan. CDs you would find in my changer range from The Jayhawks' new album to Indian pop legends like Asha Bhonsle and Muhammed Rafi. I like to listen to classical music on the radio. Some of my favorites are Bach, Scarlotti, Mozart and Schubert."

Scalzo said Fastball has been a free agent since the band was dropped by recording label Hollywood Records three albums into its contract.

"We are actively pursuing ways to put out new Fastball music, but our priority is to do the live act and perform in smaller venues at the moment," Scalzo said. "Jupiter Records in Austin, Texas has been helping us sell a new limited edition live album that was recorded in January called 'Live from Jupiter.' It features familiar as well as unreleased material."

With the recent trends in popular music shifting weight towards an artist's image, Scalzo said that glamorizing the band should be done, but within reason.

"We try to keep it professional in our business. Personally I think it's important not to let yourself go too far fashion-wise," Scalzo said. "After all, it is show biz."

After several tours across the country and world, Scalzo said performing in Texas is still a great experience.

"With our acoustic sets, crowds in California sometimes get the impression that we're going country. We've played in Texas recently as an acoustic band, and we feel more comfortable playing a lot of these songs to a Texan audience," Scalzo said. "Texans seem to like music in all forms. And since Austin is our hometown, it's great to get out there again and see the people and the country."

Rabia Yousaf, a freshman business major, said she has been a big fan of Fastball for years.

"I got 'All the Pain Money Can Buy' as a present for my birthday a few years ago. Since then, I have been hooked on to Fastball," Yousaf said. "I listened to the CD so many times that I wore it out and had to buy a new copy. They are just awesome musicians."

Fastball will make its first Northgate Music Festival appearance with a performance on Saturday, March 22 at Shadow Canyon.

## Jars

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a limited number of shows around its college campus and community. Mason said the turning point for the band came at a contest it entered in Nashville. Jars of Clay sent in a demo of three songs with no expectation of being selected to play live for record companies in Nashville.

"We really wanted input from someone to see if we were onto something," he said. "It turned out we were accepted to play in the contest, and we ended up winning."

Although Jars of Clay did not perform many live shows before it was signed as an act, touring now consumes most of its time. Mason said the band is on tour for about a year, and then it is off for six months.

"Once you start (touring), it becomes part of what you enjoy," he said. "You see a lot of great places and meet a lot of different people."

In addition to traveling to places such as Singapore, Australia, Europe and Alaska,

Jars of Clay has toured with names such as Michael W. Smith and Matchbox 20.

Now promoting its fifth album, "Furthermore," Jars of Clay is on tour with Caedmon's Call, which also recently released an album in February, "Back Home."

Todd Bragg, drummer for Caedmon's Call, said the band has had a lot of fun traveling with Jars of Clay.

"We've known each other for awhile," he said. "So it's been good to hang out."

Caedmon's Call includes Josh Moore on the piano, Garrett Buell on percussion, Cliff Young on guitar and vocals, Danielle Young on vocals and Jeff Miller on bass.

The band, though undergoing a few changes in its membership, met at a church in Houston 10 years ago.

"We didn't know what to expect. We never envisioned it would become what it has," Bragg said. "We just wanted to be honest and genuine. We didn't want to put on an act."

The band members combined their different musical backgrounds to compose a style

that Braggs described as roots in folk.

"Because everyone has a different perspective in their approach, we have a big spectrum of styles," he said. "Some songs are heavier, others are more mellow."

Basing its name on the seventh Century monk named Caedmon who was one of the first to translate Christian Scriptures into English through hymns, Caedmon's Call also draws from Scripture for its music.

According to Bragg, the band has several writers for its songs. Their jobs include selecting a song for its spiritual meaning, ensuring that it is theologically sound and making sure that it makes sense artistically. Bragg said that Caedmon's Call then "caedmonizes" each song it performs.

Lindsey Norton, a sophomore education major, looks forward to attending the concert with a group of friends.

"I love Caedmon's Call," she said. "It is upbeat Christian music. They have incredible voices, and their songs are all about praising God. (The songs really strike a chord.)"

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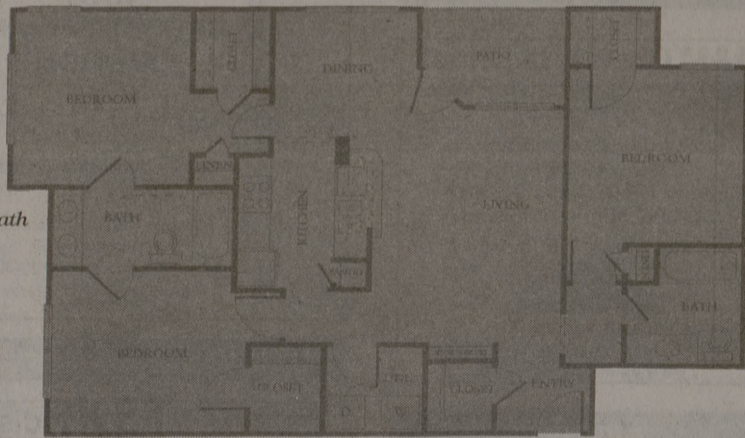
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