

In four months together, Colorado-based folk outfit [Whitacre](#) has made inroads in the local music scene and beyond. They recorded a [live album](#) at The Fox Theatre in Boulder in late September, and released a single, “Set Me Free,” on November 24.

Earlier this month, the band journeyed out of Colorado for the first time to play a show in frontman Paul Whitacre’s hometown of Indianapolis.

Theirs is a comfortable, minimalistic folk sound built around Mr. Whitacre’s plaintive yet innocent drawl, the rhythmic banjo of Chase “Chuck” Perry, the economical electric guitar work of Kyle Miner, the spacious drum parts of Mark Cunningham and the subtle bass lines of Brent Perkins.

“Set Me Free” opens with a driving acoustic rhythm part that Perry supplements with mournful harmonica. Mr. Whitacre’s vocal lines are spacious and contemplative. Perry’s banjo enters with chordal accents that become briskly picked lines later. Drums come in on the second verse, and pick up speed on the first chorus. During a catchy bridge-like section, the harmonica takes on a tone reminiscent of that of a jukebox harp, while Miner adds clean, sparing electric guitar fills.

The reprise of the “bridge” begins with a breakdown featuring just bass and shakers. The band comes in at full strength on the second pass. The interlude that follows showcases impressive interplay between banjo, electric guitar and harmonica.

A listener can simply bob his/her head to the infectious rhythms. Or, he/she can trace the intricate ebbs and flows of the various instruments that weave themselves in and out of the sound.

Either way, the single is fun to listen to. It is available now on Spotify, Apple Music and most other music outlets.

I asked the band about their past, their future and their relationships with music and each other.

Who are the band’s primary musical influences?

Paul: [Shakey Graves](#), [Rayland Baxter](#) and other chill folk artists heavily influenced my solo music. But, since becoming a band, the sound has been influenced by [The Oh Hellos](#), [The Avett Brothers](#) and [Trampled by Turtles](#) with a mix of [The Pixies](#). We love energetic folk music, but love the shredding that rock music provides as well. Whitacre gives fans the best of both worlds.

How did the band take shape?

Mark: It’s actually kind of funny how it came together. I met Paul through mutual friends playing pickup basketball, and when I later found out he played music, I reached out to him and told him to come jam sometime. Little did I know he had been trying to piece a band together and was already playing with Kyle and Chase. So he came over, I hopped on my drums and we started playing some of his songs. After playing just one he stopped and said, “Dude. What are you doing next Friday?” and asked me to play a gig he had booked. Brent is my roommate so we threw him in the mix as well and just like that, our band was born. We played that gig and it just felt right. So we decided to keep it going.

How has the band’s sound evolved?

Kyle: Even though we have been playing for about 4 months, our sound is transitioning from solo acoustic folk to a more full-sounding folk rock group. Sometimes we can get a little carried away in the moment with some howling guitar riffs, unbelievable drum fills, sick bass lines,

heavenly harmonies, off the rail harmonica breaks, or driving acoustics. In my mind, if we don't push the limits, we'll never know what we are capable of. Our sound is moving toward something moving and grooving.

Why do you make music? What do you hope to accomplish by sharing your music?

Chase: We make music because that is what we were made to do. We were made to create; we enjoy rocking out, piecing together intricate musical form, and writing lyrics that people can identify with but that also makes them think. We believe in a man named Jesus to whom we owe everything. We play music for him. We hope to inspire people to let down the walls that the world tries to get us to put up. To let these down so that we can be free to express ourselves. Whether you are on stage or in the crowd, authentic expression is medicine to the soul; it's a glimpse into our hearts.

How do you approach the songwriting process? From where do you draw inspiration for your lyrics and your music?

Paul: I tend to go for really long drives or hikes to quiet my mind in order to better understand what I feel I'm going through at the moment. I can draw inspiration from relationships, work, life experiences, etc. My relationship with God is constantly stirring creative ideas in my head, but girls do that a bit too, haha.

What are your favorite parts about being on tour? What are the most challenging aspects of touring?

Brent: Traveling to Indiana is the band's first real "tour" experience. Being in a van for so long is obviously a challenge, but because of the respect we have for one another, and the relationships we've built, we truly enjoy our time together. We can get in passionate conversations about almost anything, which makes the time fly.

How do relationships between band members affect the music?

Chase: Relationships makes the music cohesive. What I mean is that it just feels right and good when everyone is jiving together inside and outside of playing music together. Because we all know each other well (playing settlers of Catan and eating Illegal Pete's so much so that it is becoming its own staple food group in our diets), it gives depth to our playing. We are able to better connect with each other, which gives us that special freedom that comes with playing music. Music also has the power to bring people together. It has happened so many times in my life (and I am sure the other guys can testify to this as well) where I enter a rehearsal in a poor mood and leave stoked on life. Relationships also make music last. We plan on doing this a long time.

How has music influenced your life?

Mark: Music has been a part of my life since before I can even remember. My mom laughs when she recounts the memory of me in a car seat singing Elton John at the top of my lungs and telling her I want to be in a rock band when I grow up. My mom put all of her kids through piano lessons, so I starting doing that from age 5 until I left home at 19. It was in the sixth grade that I started playing percussion in band. I went on to do drum line in high school. But it was drumming in the worship band for my youth group at church that really taught me the dynamics of playing in a band. It's such a low-stress way to learn and I credit that opportunity for my being able to play with Whitacre. I think all the guys in Whitacre have similar stories of music just really being such an important part of their formative years.

How would you describe the band's journey thus far? How do you envision the band's future?

Paul: Our journey thus far has been beyond expectation. We've played shows with bands we've been following for years: Birdtalker, Boyd Tinsley (of Dave Matthews Band). It's a dream come true to play music with world-class musicians. We are all confident the future is bright – everything is a group decision. We make sure every show we play makes sense, and we work with producers/photographers who keep our brand consistent. There is really a purpose woven into every decision we make. We pray before every concert as a group because the future is truly out of our hands—we just believe God has His hand in our journey.

How do you approach playing live? How do you connect with an audience?

Kyle: When playing a live show, it's an opportunity to fully connect with the music and with the crowd. I tend to get a little too into the performance and find myself jumping through the air, singing to the audience, and engaging the crowd between songs with serious or funny banter. I also channel energy from the crowd and if they are into the music, I get more into the performance.

Is there anything else you'd like to say about the band?

Paul: 2017 has been a big year, but a learning process. Now that we've figured out how to have effective practices, built relationships with people in the industry and have a plan moving into 2018, the sky is the limit. We are so excited for bigger shows, better recordings and the new friends we'll get to make through it all in 2018!

Following our music on Spotify and [Instagram](#) is really the biggest help to us at this point as they connect fans to updates and shows in their area!