



Make a Joyful Noise

Brian T. Murphy finds an array of opportunities, from The Lone Bellow to production work.

“The biggest thing [Birmingham] did for me was that, without realizing it, I was cultivating a folk-country aesthetic. I think that it’s less intuitive to play folk or country if you are formally trained.”

—Brian T. Murphy

ALTHOUGH THE LONE BELLOW formed last year in Brooklyn, N.Y., most of its members hail from points south of the Mason-Dixon Line — including keys and accordion player Brian T. Murphy, a Birmingham transplant. He’ll return to Birmingham to perform with the band at WorkPlay on April 5.

Despite his Southern heritage, Murphy had never played folk and country music before moving to New York. “The biggest thing [Birmingham] did for me was that, without realizing it, I was cultivating a folk-country aesthetic,” says Murphy. “I think that it’s less intuitive to play folk or country if you are formally trained.”

Formally trained or not, the band makes folk-country sound natural and comfortable. Their self-titled debut album layers vocal harmonies with well-crafted instrumentals

to create a full and haunting sound. The album was recorded live at Rockwood Music Hall, and is getting attention from Billboard, NPR, the New York Times and Paste, to name a few.

However, due to the high cost of travel and other obligations, Murphy’s work with The Lone Bellow is usually limited to their studio work and regional shows. He keeps busy with producing and playing with other musicians.

“Production work is my bread and butter,” says Murphy. “I get a lot of my work from playing live and meeting people. I think about [music] more now as a producer than as a piano player.” Instead of listening solely to his part, he now listens to how it fits in with the totality of the music and gauges his playing accordingly.



Brian T. Murphy is a Birmingham-raised multi-instrumentalist and record producer, now based in Brooklyn, N.Y. He records and performs with The Lone Bellow, playing accordion and keys. The band is lead by Zach Williams, along with guitarist Brian Elmquist and singer Kanene Pipkin.



When he first moved to Brooklyn in 2010, Murphy played with The Upwelling, a Queens-based band. Since then, he has done a lot of recording work and played and written with Melanie Penn, an ex-Broadway singer. He and Brian Elmquist, a fellow member of The Lone Bellow, have teamed up to write songs including the music from the recent film “This Is Where We Live,” which premiered at Sundance Film Festival.

“Nothing will humble you more than being a musician in New York,” Murphy says. “In Birmingham, it’s rare that someone has a masters or undergrad degree in performance for their instrument, but here I’m playing with all these amazing musicians who went to [The Juilliard School].”

The biggest difference Murphy has noticed, though, is in how bands practice. “Bands can marinate in Birmingham. You practice in garages, hang out, have beer and an album eventually comes together. In New York, it’s not like that. It’s much more intentional. You have to pay for cabs, rehearsal space, so you work really intensely when you’re together,” said Murphy. “The camaraderie and the friendship is the same, it’s just a faster pace.”

Murphy misses making music in Birmingham. Since he has started playing folk and country in New York, he noticed that bands in the Magic City are not making country music. “There’s almost a resistance to it. I kind of want to go home and encourage people to make country records.” ■

BY CLAIR MCLAFFERTY

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BRIAN T. MURPHY



Details

The Lone Bellow will open for Marcus Foster at WorkPlay on April 5 at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$12 in advance or \$14 day of show, and are available at workplay.com. Learn more about The Lone Bellow at thelonebellow.com, and about Brian T. Murphy at quarterreststudios.com.