

Driven ready to give fans new music

By R.B. Headley

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The twins are dating sisters, their fiddle player's "tearing up" that instrument like never before and fans will be hearing new music when Driven delivers its Pickin' On the Plains Bluegrass and Folk Festival performance this week.

"We're all excited about the new music," Colby's Brandon McLemore proclaimed after writing nine of the 12 original tunes being mixed into a compact disc.

He said Grammy-Award-winning engineer Neal Cappalino is handling the technical mixing, which should complete in time for a September release. Cappalino has worked with "sort-of-famous" musicians including Brad Paisley, Carrie Underwood, Darius Rucker, Hank Williams Jr., Vince Gill and Dolly Parton, just to name a few.

The Pickin' stage is the perfect location for brothers Brandon and Blake McLemore, considering Colby is where Blake took on that big, tall, ominous-looking bass more than 10 years ago.

"Brandon had started playing mandolin," Blake said, "so I had to pick up something to fill out the family band (The McLemores also features mom Susan and dad Bob.) It wasn't easy at age 10. Just the size of a bass was a challenge. I remember standing on some stools as I played."

No stools are needed now when Driven takes to the stage.

Driven will play from 9:15 to 10 p.m. Friday and again from 3:25 to 4:10 p.m. and from 7:05 to 7:50 Saturday.

It's all high energy for lead vocalist/banjo/dobro player Jimmy Campbell, banjo/guitar player/vocalist Jake Workman, fiddle player/vocalist Rebekah Workman and the vocalist/musician McLemore brothers.

"Jimmy Campbell is full of energy; his lead voice is one of the best in bluegrass," Blake said. "Rebekah took over as fiddler for our old friend Jimmy Vincent, and she has really come into her own."

"Rebekah has taken off like crazy. She just keeps getting better every year," Brandon confirmed. "She's definitely no longer known as the guitar player's wife."

The Workmans do make quite a husband-wife team. When not teaching about 40 to 50 musical students full-time, Jake has joined Rebekah in forming their own bluegrass band. They help organize festivals and events around their Salt Lake City home.

It's a long way from Jake's early Classic Rock guitar-playing days, when he played Boston, Led Zeppelin and AC/DC tunes.

"I didn't have any desire for bluegrass," Jake said, "but I got a banjo when I was 14. I didn't want to make my parents feel bad by



Driven band members (from left) Brandon McLemore, Jimmy Campbell, Blake McLemore, Jake Workman and Rebekah Workman made some final preparations for a 2012 Pickin'

not playing it.

"It grew on me. I started playing it about six hours every day," the two-time national high school banjo finalist said. "Like anything, you have to have a passion for it. And now bluegrass has gradually become my music of choice."

Jake took time to write one instrumental song for Driven's upcoming new CD. Blake McLemore teamed with Brandon to write one, adding to Brandon's nine, and lifelong musician Campbell penned that other song.

It's quite a project, considering all the members have full-time occupations. Brandon works in the Colby Community College admissions office, while Blake works at a Kansas Department of Agriculture office near McPherson.

"I help farmers and ranchers with different methods of farming," he said, "the most suitable ways to protect their natural resources."

In other words, both brothers still see music as a hobby — and that's the way they would like to continue seeing it.

"If it becomes work, that changes everything," Blake explained. "I doubt we would ever do music full-time. Jimmy Campbell's been asked to play for bigger bands, but he likes to keep it a hobby. We all love the family life and wouldn't want to be traveling every weekend. Hopefully, we'll continue to entertain."

"We plan on mixing more humor into our show (at Colby)," Brandon added. "We want to keep the crowd entertained and wanting more."

The brothers also hope more Colby-area residents will attend Pickin' On the Plains this year. It's been a family love since Bob and Susan McLemore debuted the idea 18 years ago.

And the brothers will join the original McLemores band for a performance.

"I remember how it was just sort of a

thrown-together thing at first," Blake said. "It's been impressive how it has spread and the quality of bands have improved. But sometimes, it seems like a lot of the crowd are

people who travel to bluegrass festivals. It'd be great if more Colby people came out and saw what it's all about."

EVAN BARNUM/Colby Free Press

On the Plains' performance. They'll take the stage three more times this year, giving fans a preview of songs that are being mixed on a new compact disc set to be released in September.

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