

MUSICAL CHAIR

SALT & PINE

Now and again, an act comes along with hearts full of gratitude for a city embracing them with arms wide open.

By Teddy Regis | Photography by Dan Florez

I imagine curating the soundtrack to a sun-soaked downtown stroll. Which mood would it evoke? Would it capture hometown nostalgia?

Perhaps the notion that good things are forthcoming? Four St. Augustinians have joined forces in the name of making wistful music that, while steeped in tradition, is ever progressive.

Salt & Pine is a Folk Americana band with just a little Pop and Rock flair. They are front-man Nolan Baker, vocalist Haley Thompson, string maestro Matthew Kirkland, and cellist Sam Shen.

"We're a St. Augustine story," shares Nolan. While making rounds on the Old City music circuit, he met Haley. Both were searching for people with whom to play music and after just one rehearsal, it was clear — their voices harmonized. Eventually, they met Matthew and Sam after their respective gigs. Nolan's enthusiasm for their talent led to a direct invitation to join his band — they were in. "I don't think I had the cable out of my instrument yet," recalls Matthew with a hearty chuckle.

The experiences that shaped each member prepared them for collaboration. Nolan was an avid writer before picking up a guitar in college. Musically, he was self-taught, finding songwriting the perfect vehicle for all his talents. Before she could even speak, Haley was using a washer and dryer as a drum set, and now Nolan describes her as a "consummate performer." Matthew's journey to multi-instrumentalism crystallized in his 20s when

If the band's name piques your curiosity, think of "salt" and "pine" as actions. Nolan says, "To salt something is to heal or to preserve...you can pine for something." In a city still recovering from disaster, that speaks volumes.

he tapped into his Southern Gospel heritage. His first of many instruments was jazz bass, but while visiting his grandmother, Matthew

found an Omnichord thrown in a closet circa 1983. It has a fitting new home with the band, paying homage to the folk revival. Sam's first memory is the sound of his grandfather's piano playing and he initially embarked on a four-year piano path before being persuaded to take up the cello. A defining moment arose when he saw a fellow cellist improvise stunning phrases during a rehearsal.

Though they book regular shows, Salt & Pine still performs to a warm reception of fellow open mic artists from their earlier days. Haley says it's like "playing on home field." Their debut

album, *Sinking In*, was released in January and can be found across several platforms including Pandora and Spotify. Their second music video is in the works, and they're already sitting on enough material for another record. But when Salt & Pine isn't performing all throughout St. Augustine and a bit of Jacksonville too, they play audience and support local artists.

If the band's name piques your curiosity, think of "salt" and "pine" as actions. Nolan says, "To salt something is to heal or to preserve...you can pine for something." In a city that pines for restoration in the wake of major hurricanes, this is an act that speaks to the heart of who we are as resilient St. Augustinians.

www.facebook.com/saltandpinemusic

