

CONWAY the Calm Coming

Conway duo cut country CD

By [Tammy Keith](#)



CONWAY — To be honest, it's easier to picture Matthew Huff as a country music star than what he is - a third-grade teacher.

"We're a rare breed," he said of being a male elementary school teacher.

He hopes to be an even rarer breed - an elementary teacher who gets a record contract.

Huff, 29, and Dean Hatcher, 37, both of Conway, joined talents in late May to form the Calm Coming, and their four-track demo CD is being re-released this week after being tweaked.

Huff was friends first with Hatcher's wife, Renee, who is the media specialist at Woodrow Cummins Elementary School.

"Right before the new school opened, I played a few songs for a fundraiser for Woodrow Cummins. He and I talked," Huff said of himself and Hatcher. "We didn't get to know each other until later on in the year. I was better friends with Renee.

"We (Huff and Hatcher) hit it off and we started hanging out more."

Huff said he was pretty sure he and Hatcher would never work together musically.

"Dean hated the new country stuff, and that's what I loved," he said.

But neither could resist playing music.

"We were grilling out at his house one night ... he started pecking out on the piano, and I started singing, I think it was a Bryan Adams song. We said, 'Let's give this a shot,'" Huff recalled.

Hatcher agreed that the partnership "started in the backyard over a barbecue grill."

The guys have played benefit concerts - one last week in front of about 500 people at Hendrix College that raised almost \$4,000 for Arkansas Children's Hospital - and one last summer in front of "about seven people" on a basketball court in Damascus, Hatcher said.

Huff said their "paying gigs" are at Doe's Eat Place in Conway and Centennial Valley Country Club.



The Calm Coming also will perform Friday at Dazzle Daze in the Conway Sports Center.

Huff said they'll shop the CD to Nashville record labels in January.

Little by little, word is getting around about the pair.

"It's become so surreal to us what's happening," Hatcher said.

Hatcher, who grew up in Mississippi, said he started "picking" at the piano when he was 3 and started taking lessons at age 8. It was classic country that he heard at home, such as Loretta Lynn and Lynn Anderson.

He said some of the current country, like Garth Brooks, he enjoys, but he joked that Huff "has a man crush on Keith Urban. I'm trying to draw him into the Pink Floyd, Van Morrison, Rolling Stones era."

Hatcher played percussion in the University of Southern Mississippi marching band for a year and was in a five-member band with fraternity brothers.

"It was such a high when you were on stage playing for people," he said.

While serving in the U.S. Army Reserve JAG (Judge Advocate General's Corps) from 1993 to 2001, he started working for Waffle House and is now a district manager. He also has a degree in management; a master's in English and is working on his educational doctorate.

He and his wife, who have a 12-year-old son, Brennan, moved around for several years. When they moved to Arkansas, he got a piano.

"I fell back in love with playing classical music and old church hymns and '80s rock 'n' roll," he said.

The demo CD they made has the title track "Back Again" that Huff wrote, which is based on a breakup - from a recent experience.

Huff said, "It was a three year relationship with a girl, and I was the one who was finally strong enough to call it off back in April. It was a back-and-forth thing for three years. She definitely broke my heart."

He gave up music for most of their relationship, he said.

"I was so consumed with her that music wasn't even an option. I wrote 'Back Again' and, yes, it's about her and my feelings at the time. She was the inspiration."

Hatcher said many people identify with the raw feelings in that song.

"The song 'Back Again' has taken on such a new life the more that we play it, as far as the type of emotion that goes into it," he said.



That's one reason for re-recording the CD, Hatcher said, to add more instruments and smooth out that song.

Hatcher contributed a song on the demo, one that he wrote in collaboration with fraternity brothers in college about a member going to the Gulf War.

"I reworked some of it when I found out Renee was pregnant," Hatcher said. "I would put the headphone around her stomach and play it when Brennan was inside. Anytime I'd do that when he was kicking around, he'd stop."

Hatcher said Huff is the lead singer, and he sings backup vocals, piano and does background arrangements.

"The music is pretty, but I think the lyrics pretty much to all the songs reach out and grab you," Hatcher said.

Huff said he was at an Arkansas Travelers' baseball game, and he and Hatcher, who was relaxing at home, were texting possible band names back and forth.

"Half of them didn't make sense," Huff said.

Later, when he got home, the words Calm Coming popped into his mind, and that was it.

When he first started, he said co-workers at school made comments like, "When you make it big, don't forget us," and the kids were excited.

"It's kind of like my kids hear it on the radio and it's no big deal to them now. It's like, 'Oh, there's Mr. Huff.' I think they think every kid's teacher is on the radio."

Huff, who grew up in Mammoth Spring, said he doesn't really come from a musical family.

His paternal and maternal grandmothers had talent, but that's it, he said. His parents are divorced.

"I've grown up, I guess, with that passion internally. My mom has an old picture, I was about 3, I don't have a shirt on. I'm at my dad's parents and they live in West Helena. I had some star shaped glasses and they were blue and like blacked out, you know, and I was banging on an old piano," he said.

"I grew up singing up in church, like a lot of people do, and I was in group called the Praise Posse," he said. "We put together skits and songs and traveled in Missouri and Arkansas. That's kind of where it all got started for me," he said.

Huff knew he wanted to make it big as a singer.

"It was always a dream. That and Major League Baseball were always my dream," he said.



He went to the University of Central Arkansas and successfully auditioned for the University Choir.

"I've never sang in choir before. That was a totally new experience. ... It was awesome," he said.

He decided his sophomore year to put down the guitar and pick up a piece of chalk.

"I know exactly what moment it kind of hit me. I had a younger cousin talking about a teacher. We were probably at Christmas or something. He was, at that point, about five years younger, talking about a guy teacher doing all this cool stuff with them," Huff said.

He said two of his elementary school teachers - Mr. Turnbough in third grade and Mrs. Pendarvis, who has since died, in fifth grade - were his inspirations.

"Mr. Turnbough was kind of your firmness, you know, but I can remember, he'd still go out and play basketball with us. About three days a week I go out with my kids and play. Pendarvis was more the comforting teacher," he recalled.

As much as he loves teaching, Huff's goal is a record deal for the Calm Coming.

"It's such a big goal, you know, something may not hit for a year," he said.

Some people would say expecting to hit it big in a year is being optimistic.

"I don't know what it is, but I have never felt more strongly about something," Huff said. "I think it's because the people I've been talking to know the business and they've heard us play."

Hatcher said, "I think we've always said we don't want to be a bar band.

"I hope our sound catches on, because it is so unique," he said, calling it "Simon and Garfunkely."

"I would love for whatever we do to entertain somebody, whether it's seven people in Damascus or 70,000 in Madison Square Garden," he said.

The duo's Web site is thecalmcoming.ning.com.

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