



FAST LANE

WITH A HOT NEW RECORD AND A NATIONAL TOUR, THE WOODLANDS' DRIVER FRIENDLY HAS THE PEDAL TO THE METAL!

By Tara Seetharam
Photography by Stephen Dement

The Woodlands natives who make up the now Austin-based band Driver Friendly have Tom Hanks to thank for their first label-backed album. It may seem unlikely, but it's true.

In 2012, they released a video for their upbeat tune "Messidona," with re-created scenes from the Oscar winner's films. According to guitarist Andy Lane, Hanks' daughter—a fan of the pop rockers—showed the video to her father, who asked what would happen if he re-tweeted it. "They'd probably get signed," she quipped.

The tweet ("one snappy record") indeed helped lead to an offer from Hopeless Records after a decade of stop-and-starts. And it set in motion their fifth album, *Unimagined Bridges*, which dropped last month.

The boys—including Lane, frontman Tyler

IN HIGH GEAR

"It's big-boy time" for Driver Friendly, says guitarist Andy Lane. The group recently signed with a label and is currently touring the nation. From left: Chris Walker, Lane, Tyler Welsh, Juan Lopez and Jeremi Mattern.

Welsh, bass guitarist Chris Walker, drummer Jeremi Mattern and trumpet player Juan Lopez, all in their late 20s—are on a nationwide tour in support of the record. They'll pass through Houston on Aug. 1 to play the Eastdown Warehouse (850 Mckee St., 713.280.6778).

Since snagging the record deal, the band has gone from playing ATX dives to playing to 2,000 people at Houston's Free Press Summer Fest this year—a staggering transition. "It's big-boy time," Lane laughs. In fact, they drew upon the evolution in developing *Unimagined Bridges*; the record's title refers to a German poem that advocates building a bridge from darkness to hope. "This is us trying to transform from the unsigned artist who was kind of doubtful to the artist who's just trying to do it."

Wide-eyed earnestness has been a signature of the band's work since the members met back in 2002, marching on the high school drum line. Over the years, they've turned themes of believing in one's self and optimistic perseverance into bright and cleanly energetic tunes with flourishes of trombone and trumpet; their latest single, "Stand So Tall," is a bouncy jam that promises you can crawl your way out of a ditch despite feeling "collapsible at best."

Despite knowing each other for more than a decade, the band members can't seem to get enough of each other: They once spent two weeks at a remote North Carolina cabin where they held dance parties, pingpong tournaments and drunken, soul-searching discussions that informed their music. Shortly after, Lopez and Welsh moved in together—with their wives. "They've got a *Full House* situation going on," says Lane, adding that, as a crew, band members enjoy chowing down on barbecue, watching *Battlestar Galactica* and studying. (Lane and Walker are in grad school for psychotherapy and music composition, respectively, and Welsh has just set aside his plans for a Ph.D. in English.) "We're all total nerds," Lane insists.

And unlike that *other* band from the tony Houston suburb to the north, Arcade Fire—"Don't talk to them about [The Woodlands]," Lane says. "They'll get angry"—the boys of Driver Friendly are always eager to make their way home, per their name, which itself is inspired by a unique Texas road sign. "We really would have dwindled away if it weren't for the people here. We just love this state."