

Sound all around

Eau Claire music project pairs university musicians with local and touring artists each month

Story by Rachel Streich, Staff Writer

Once a month, musicians will travel to Eau Claire and step off the stage to perform in a different setting. They will gather in a single room with a group of community members and students to transform a piece of their work.

And their audience is not in a theater or coffee shop, but on the Internet.

The Arco Sessions, a series of films featuring singer/songwriters and bands on tour as well as local musicians, began almost a year ago after Davy Sumner, UW-Eau Claire alumnus and composer, put the idea into action.

Since then, Sumner and a group of sound engineers, videographers and writers have collaborated to produce the five videos on the Arco Sessions' website and more yet to be posted. Artists ranging from Minneapolis to Tennessee have paired with the instruments and voices of many UW-Eau Claire students.

"It's exciting for me to see it come to life," Sumner said, "and also to see really positive things come out of it."

The students involved gain a real-world experience in a recording studio with each performance, he said.

Laura Severson, a junior music education major who played viola in two of the films, said the Arco Sessions has given her an opportunity to get her name out to the public and to become a better musician through practice. It has also allowed her to make new connections.

"Getting to meet other people that aren't from Eau Claire and that are actual musicians making their way through life as performers is reassuring for a student to see," she said.

In the most recent video featuring Minneapolis singer/songwriter Haley Bonard, sophomore Hannah Hebl said her vocal performance with the musician will be something she can potentially post on a website to demonstrate her work.

Touring bands and singer/songwriters have responded in positive ways as well.

Artists have asked Eau Claire musicians to make appearances on their CDs and they have recommended the Arco Sessions to other musicians, Sumner said.



Haley Bonar sings with sophomore Hannah Hebl for the Arco Sessions. Submitted

Sumner said he didn't need to seek out the next band to be featured on the website. They contacted him and made a special trip to Eau Claire to be a part of one of the films.

Local sponsorship is new factor in the making of the videos is. Businesses like the Eau Claire Music School financially supported the work and created more community involvement with the films.

As the Arco Sessions continue, the videos reach beyond Eau Claire through the internet.

"We've had people watch from just about every continent...and it really does shine a positive light on Eau Claire, the Chippewa valley and UW-Eau Claire specifically as a really talented, creative place," said Thom Fountain, coordinator of media and web design for the Arco Sessions and managing editor at Volume One Magazine.

Looking to the future, Sumner said the videos will venture in new creative directions. A film coming out in the next few months features a rapper with a flute, a saxophone and brass instruments.

Viewers can look forward to the next video appearing on the Arco Sessions website in early February featuring the Minneapolis band, The Farewell Circuit. With new videos coming out consistently, Sumner said he hopes the series keeps going indefinitely as a piece of the Eau Claire music community.