

# after edmund

Having been raised on a hearty intake of indie, classic and experimental rock, along with the fact that members are classically trained and met amidst college music classes, are just a few points of distinction for After Edmund in the modern pop/rock pack. The LaGrange, Georgia-groomed quintet (named after the Edmund character in C.S. Lewis' bestselling book series The Chronicles of Narnia) has been electrifying that regional scene and beyond since 2001, touring tirelessly and refining a potent alternative sound that merges the timeless sensibilities of Pink Floyd and the Beatles with the organic influences of Wilco, the dynamic swells of Keane, plus the band's own razor-sharp rhythms and introspective lyrics.

"We grew up listening to all kinds of music—classical and classic rock to jazz and experimental stuff. We're kind of a melting pot, a unique fingerprint for Christian music, combining so many of our individual musical influences into one sound," notes bassist Matt McFadden, while making it apparent members' Christian beliefs are a clear lyrical component. "Our musical backgrounds are so diverse, and it's interesting to see how we pull it all together; but more than just sounding strong, we hope and pray our varied backgrounds will open us up to a larger audience—one not subject to the same three chords over and over."

And those elements are exactly what attracted Slanted Records, the pop/rock/alternative indie label under the Spring Hill Music umbrella, which also recently launched the Grammy-nominated act DecembeRadio. The two bands share the same producer Scotty Wilbanks (Third Day, Overflow, Echoing Angels), who introduced After Edmund to the highly interested staff when demoing tracks for its national debut.

"We actually had a handful of labels interested; but the reason we went with Slanted was we really felt like they were After Edmund fans and we'd seen what they had done with DecembeRadio," McFadden continues. "Slanted didn't feel like business. It was really more like a partnership and friendship where we've both decided to work really hard."

"Another reason we were really interested was from a musical perspective," interjects lead vocalist Mitch Parks. "Everyone allowed us to just keep doing what we were already doing with Scotty. He had already made a record with Slanted, and we loved how the label embraced an "out-of-the-box" sound, allowing bands to make an album that is 100% who they are. That's what we wanted to create—a non-typical style that is uniquely After Edmund."

The results have proven to be overwhelmingly fruitful throughout the ambitious Hello, which fans from any scene can recognize for its artful approach when it hits the shelves in July of 2007. Between the vast degree of inventive muses, plus members' own individual talents and chemistry with one another, the disc is drenched with an engaging sonic landscape and thought-provoking lyrical fodder.

"When we talk about several of us being classically trained, it is not meant to sound like showing off," explains drummer Adam Stanley. "Hopefully people won't listen and say 'they sound like music majors,' but our goal through that kind of practice and study is the ability to make better music where we know what we're doing in the studio rather than just stabbing around in the dark. If our backgrounds are not facilitating better art, it's pretty worthless other than just for amusement's sake."

Several practical examples can be traced in the Hello sessions, such as the fact that every member brought ideas to the table and worked through many of the arrangements even outside of their dominant instrument. Since everyone can read music, they can easily switch around stations in the studio or tell each other specific suggestions for a player's particular part.

"This is definitely one of the most talented bands I've ever worked with," confirmed Wilbanks. "Most of the guys play at least two to three different instruments. It's pretty cool when the drummer can pick up a guitar and start playing jazz standards and the lead guitar player goes over to the piano and starts playing some Joplin. The guys do a high energy live show, and I wanted to do my best to capture that vibe in the studio...there's no programming on this record. Everything was played live in the studio by the band, kind of 'old school' for today's way of making records. I'm really pumped about the sounds we got on this record...."

"If Adam has an idea for a bass part, he'll just go up and show me," echoes McFadden. "If our guitarist Ben has an idea for piano, he'll go show Yates. Mitch, our lead singer and guitarist, actually notated piano parts for the song 'Like a Dream' in the middle of the night so he wouldn't forget them and then came into rehearsal the next day to show us that part."

That track is a gloriously ethereal example of After Edmund's unity (plus uncanny ability to align melody with lyrics) which includes a high flying chorus streaked in Parks' stirring falsetto. The even more intense rock n' roller "Fighting For Your Heart" exposes the band at its energetic pinnacle while prompting listeners to surrender their fears to God and cast all burdens upon His shoulders. A further example of dynamic shifting comes in the sublime ballad "To See You Leave," which takes on a raw edge highlighted with purposefully under-produced grit.

"From a lyrical standpoint, I feel like anyone can relate to that song," suggests Parks of the latter track. "A lot of Christian songs talk about things only "church people" can understand. There's not a person on the planet whom God doesn't love and desire a relationship with, and I wanted to talk about that in a way that anyone could understand."

Other selections stem from a deeply dug spiritual sustenance. "Thank God" has become a live classic, bearing musical resemblance to the Foo Fighters and Muse while unveiling thoughts of God being the ultimate source of peace and stability over temporary earthly treasures. The artsy, almost chromatic feel of "Clouds" speaks of Christ's presence in our lives through the storms we face and how He lifts us above the clouds while simultaneously encouraging the downtrodden that better days are yet to come.

"Scotty has been a huge influence on us, and that's helped make all of these songs better than our original intentions," offers McFadden. "He helped us bring out the best in the songs and made sure they sound like us and accurately convey the musical and personal messages we have in our hearts."

Much of those emotions stem from the guys' personal lives, which have been openly intertwined into the progressive fabric of the project. Ben and Matt are each married (and Matt also serves as a youth pastor); Mitch has a wedding on the way; while recent university graduate Yates scored the top spot in his graduating class; the band members are actively involved in their local churches while at home, including serving as worship leaders.

And Hello is sure to score big with listeners as the group offers its high-energy, complex compositions on this debut. The band builds on those commendable report cards with an electric sound that alternates rhythmically and sonically while capturing the raw, fluid vocals of lead man Parks. Just like throwing creative caution to the wind, the guys have turned over complete control of their future to the ultimate Creator and are keeping their cool. After all, it's never been their goal to amass money or fame, but to truly touch lives one listener at a time.

"A lot of our ministry is off stage since we enjoy talking to people and hearing what's on their mind," Stanley sums up. "God doesn't come into every conversation; but He does much of the time, and we are happy to share how faithful He's been to us. Being a musician, life is really uncertain, but we've never missed a meal! We'll be happy to share that, plus a lot of people are looking for someone outside their families to help them feel validated. Just being a listening ear does wonders for their self-esteem, which is an important part in finding the Truth. Sure we're all sinners; but on the flipside, we're beautiful in God's eyes and people have to realize how much He loves them."