

agua trip

A band's journey from APSU to New York City

By CHARLES BOOTH Feature Writer



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steady rain pelted taxicabs in the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood of New York City when Lindsey Boise ('02) emerged from the subway without an umbrella.

He didn't slouch or cover his head with his bag to stay dry. Boise merely shoved his hands deep in his jean pockets and headed east, letting the rain strike his long black hair and mutton-chop sideburns. Bill Carrasco, his friend and a former professor at Austin Peay State University, walked next to him, holding an umbrella over his close-cropped hair.

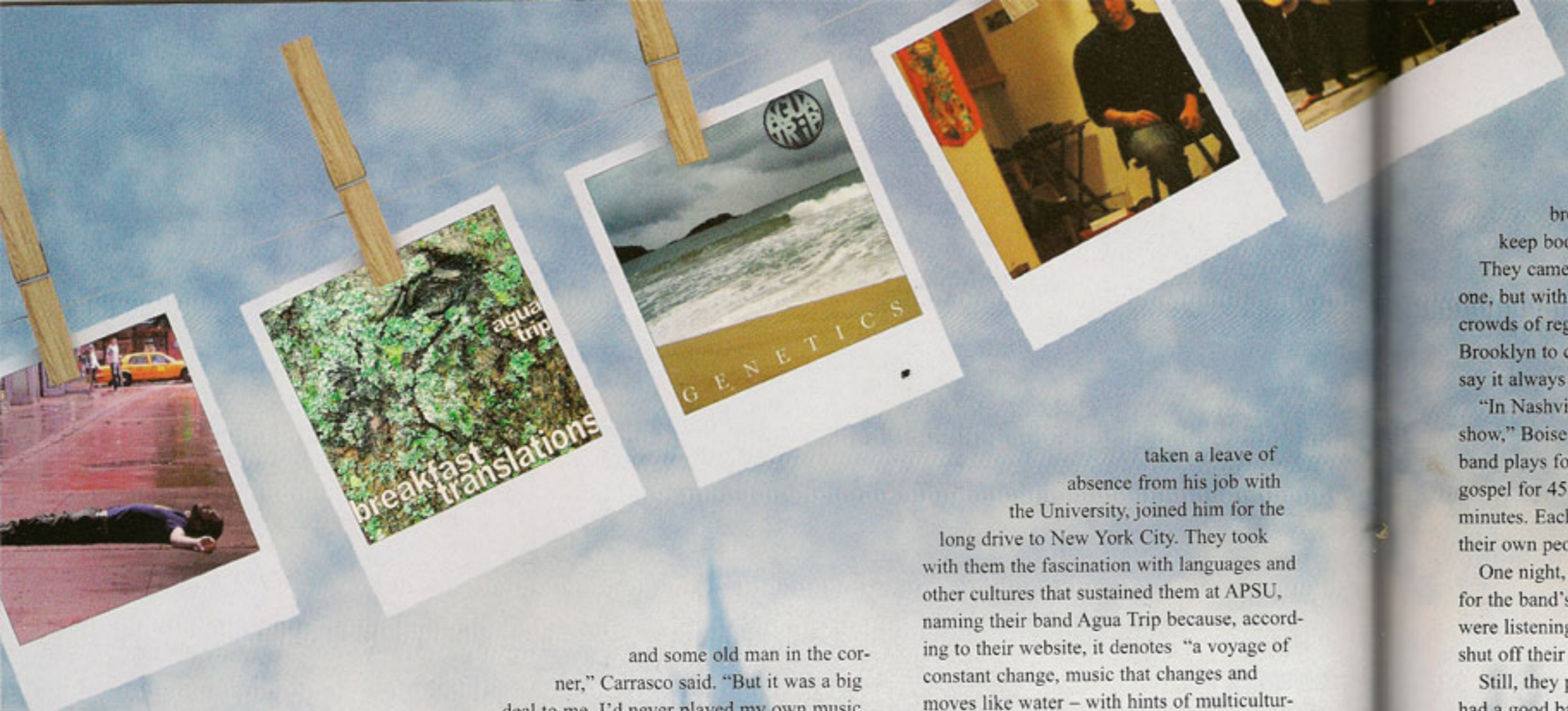
It was about 6:30 p.m. on a Friday in June, but the temperatures in New York were unsummer-like for a Tennessee native. The hundreds of pedestrians jostling by on the sidewalks wore raincoats or corduroy blazers. On Ninth Avenue, Carrasco suggested they stop by a martini bar named Vintage to dry off. It's where many Broadway actors and actresses go after their shows, he explained, and they sold a drink named after his sister, who recently appeared in the musical "Chicago."

The two men ducked inside and dried themselves off under the dim red glow of

the restaurant's wall lamps. The drink of the evening was called "Roxane's Martini of the People," and after a few sips, Boise and Carrasco shed the gloomy malaise that had drenched them outside. Their conversation took on a jam-session quality as they riffed on music, philosophy, New York City and, of course, Austin Peay State University.

the band

Boise and Carrasco are better known in New York as the founders and only constant members of the band Agua Trip.



contributed photos

The two men, 11 years apart in age, are from slightly different generations, and their influences range from The Beatles to Ska to Brazil's Tropicalia musical movement. Put together, they create a genre-defying, dreamlike sound that seems vaguely nostalgic.

"It's more in the song writing and the mood," Boise said. "The music's pretty varied. We basically do our own things. It's a project more than a band."

The first time they performed in public, however, in the fall of 2000, only about three people showed up.

Boise, an Austin Peay State University student at the time, arrived early that night to the now defunct Clarksville coffeehouse, Café Paradiso, carrying his guitar. Carrasco, an APSU languages and literature professor, was already inside, tuning his own guitar.

The two met a few months earlier at a party for French majors and faculty and had a long conversation about music and musical influences that ended with Carrasco declaring, "Let's make a band."

Why not, Boise said. After a few months of jamming together and developing songs ("I don't know if they were songs yet," Boise remembers. "They were chords and riffs and melodies and ideas."), the two headed to the small coffee shop on Riverside Drive to perform before their first audience.

"I remember it was two high school girls

and some old man in the corner," Carrasco said. "But it was a big deal to me. I'd never played my own music publicly."

When they finished their set, the few hands out in the crowd came together. The applause, because of the small number of people present, sounded sparse and awkward, but also genuine.

"They were into it," Boise said. "It actually felt good to play something that people cared a little bit about. It was a positive experience."

Then came May of 2002. "I was graduating and we were kind of like 'let's go somewhere,'" Boise said.

It would have been all too easy for the two men to abandon their musical aspirations and continue with their lives. Carrasco was a full-time, tenure-track college professor teaching Spanish and French. He was only 32 at the time and described by colleagues as "highly intelligent."

Boise was lauded with equal praise and had the potential to pursue a similar career in academia.

"Lindsey was one of the brightest students I'd ever had in French, and he was my student assistant for several years," Dr. Karen Sorenson, APSU French professor, said. "He could have easily gone to a good graduate program in French if that had been his dream. Music runs in his blood, though, and it has always been a significant part of who he is."

That part of both men prompted them to leave Clarksville and trek out into the unknown.

Shortly after Boise graduated from APSU, he packed a moving van. Carrasco, who'd

taken a leave of absence from his job with the University, joined him for the long drive to New York City. They took with them the fascination with languages and other cultures that sustained them at APSU, naming their band Agua Trip because, according to their website, it denotes "a voyage of constant change, music that changes and moves like water – with hints of multiculturalism (thus the bilingual title)."

A lot of people don't ever take that plunge, but then again, a lot of people do. The two musicians were about to learn the realities of making it in a city like New York.

making it in nyc

Boise finished his martini and then ordered a mojito. The restaurant was intimate and reasonably priced. It had the feel of a local haunt, populated by actual New Yorkers, not the tourists crowding under the lights of Times Square two streets over.

But in 2002, the two of them knew little of these little dives. They arrived as strangers into this labyrinth of concrete and steel. Carrasco's hair was long and wavy then, while Boise had enough to pull back into a ponytail, with a goatee and mustache to accompany it.

Café Paradiso loomed about 900 miles behind them. Inside a small apartment in trendy Williamsburg, they unpacked their guitars. It was time to make music.

"We immediately went to open mics," Carrasco said. "There are open mics everywhere. There is one that you have to go to get a number and they play all night until dawn. There are hundreds of bands, hundreds of artists. You draw from a hat, and you play when your number is picked."

Bar and club managers liked what they heard. Agua Trip booked gigs around the city, performing regularly at places with names like B3, Low Bar, Lion's Den, Le Bar Bat

and Lizard Lounge. "We had a guy say as long as we brought 40 people or more, he'd keep booking us," Carrasco said.

They came to town knowing hardly anyone, but within a few months, they had crowds of regulars going to midtown or Brooklyn to catch their shows. That isn't to say it always went smoothly.

"In Nashville, people come for the whole show," Boise said. "Here, it's like this rock band plays for 45 minutes, change over to gospel for 45 minutes, then we play for 45 minutes. Each one of those gigs brings in their own people and then they leave."

One night, a deejay didn't particularly care for the band's music and, even though people were listening and enjoying themselves, he shut off their microphones.

Still, they played pretty consistently. They had a good band and recently picked up a drummer named Dan Weiner, who performed with the show STOMP. Free time, however, was becoming more rare for the two founders. Boise worked full time as a Web and graphic designer, and Carrasco held an administrative position at Columbia University's Barnard College.

"We decided we were just going to record," Boise said. "We stopped playing live and recorded for a year."

They focused on song writing – honing the spontaneity of a jam session into something that could be put down on a CD. In 2005, Agua Trip's first album, "Breakfast Translations," came out. All the songs were written, performed, produced and engineered by Carrasco and Boise. The CD, with its tropical, international beats and songs, titled "Amor y Frijoles" and "Ars Poetica," harkened back to their multicultural interests.

But once the album was released, the two constant members of Agua Trip again felt the allure of performing in public.

"We decided we wanted to play live again," Boise said. "We decided, 'let's play live again and let's make it into a party.'"

a moveable feast

The rain picked up outside, sending more people into the restaurant. The chatter of all those new voices caused Boise to speak louder as he described the "art parties" Agua Trip began hosting. The waitress picked up his empty mojito glass, leaving a wet ring on the table.

"Most of our friends here revolve around the arts, whether it's visual arts or performing arts," he said. "The idea, and the name has been used before, is the moveable feast. It's like the salons in France in the 1800s. Come and show off your work, in a modern sense. All our friends get together and show each other what they're doing."

In the months that followed, Boise and Carrasco hosted these parties attended by musicians, poets, writers, comedians, artists, sculptors and dancers. Usually, the crowd heard a new song by Agua Trip. The band was working on its next album.

After a few months of hosting parties and

future trips?

Boise and Carrasco finished their drinks, left the restaurant and headed down 49th Street in the rain. A few minutes earlier, back at the table, someone asked what the future held for Agua Trip.

They talked about scoring movies and releasing other albums, but then Boise turned unexpectedly candid.

"The reality is pretty simply," he said. "Bill's probably going to move to the West Coast, and I'm going to move back to Nashville. Probably relatively soon."

"We're gradually moving to working separately," Carrasco said. "We're still collab-

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developing new music, they produced the 20-song album – Genetics. To publicize it, they hosted a special moveable feast.

"We called 20 of our friends for 20 of our songs and asked if anyone was interested in illustrating a song," Boise said.

They provided simply a song title and gave these artists free rein to interpret that however they wanted.

"I was completely happy and fascinated by what they produced," Boise said.

For the release party, they created a visual songbook containing the works of art. And, as Boise was quick to point out, eight of the contributors came from his alma mater and Carrasco's former employer - APSU. They include the artists Chip Boles, Ginger Burden Boise, Megan Ellis, William Gentry, Rachel Hall Kirk, Chris Johnson, Jackson Martin and Brad Reagan.


So, one evening in 2008, at a theater off Broadway in New York, the works and music of these individuals affiliated with APSU were on display.

orating. You can do that with technology."

They walked on in the rain, and at an intersection with Eighth Avenue, Boise and Carrasco shook hands. They were heading in different directions. One was catching the subway to Washington Heights, the other to Queens.

"At the moment, we're both working so much, we're trying to get back into playing," Boise said earlier.

"We live five miles from each other, but it takes an hour and a half to see each other," Carrasco said.

They finished shaking hands. Carrasco turned and disappeared among the hundreds of other umbrellas heading north. Boise shoved his hands in his pockets and, without slouching, headed east, letting the rain soak his black hair and mutton-chop sideburns. 

To check out what the band's doing these days, or to listen to all of their songs, visit www.aguatrip.com.