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## UPC brings The Driver Era to Auburn



The Driver Era headlines UPC's Fall Concert on August 24, 2024. Photo by [Luca Flores](#) | [Photo Editor](#) | The Auburn Plainsman

By [Ella Walton](#) | [Newsletter Editor](#) and [Michaela Yielding](#) | [News Editor](#)

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Students filled the parking lot across from the Gogue Performing Arts Center on Aug. 24, eagerly awaiting entry to see The Driver Era. A tradition for the Fall semester, the University Program Council holds a concert for the First 56, which lasts from Aug. 12 to Oct. 6 and is a way for students of any level to be connected to Auburn and the campus.

Clad in fabric skirts, denim, band tees and cowboy boots, students quickly cleared out the free tickets to the show, with UPC giving out all tickets 20 minutes after gates opened at 4:30 p.m. Food trucks, a photo backdrop and outdoor games lined the parking lot and music boomed as a block party for the concert.

Cole Wheeler, UPC's president, anticipated a large crowd and reassured the students' entry to GPAC. Wheeler, senior in professional flight, has been involved in UPC since freshman year.

Wheeler became a director his sophomore year. Junior year, Wheeler worked as vice-president of creative events where he oversaw three of the programming committees. As president, Wheeler oversees all committees and is a resource for each UPC member.

"It's honestly a really enjoyable experience," said Wheeler. "I've loved being the president and kind of, you know, just getting to know everyone in UPC and being the voice of UPC to everyone else."

UPC's Fall Concert occurs on the first Saturday of the school year. Acts in the previous years included Dayglow, Maddie & Tae and Saint Motel.

Brothers Rocky and Ross Lynch make up The Driver Era. Their music, described as a fusion of funk, R&B and alternative rock, has helped them gain over 1 million monthly listeners on Spotify.

The Driver Era's appearance in Auburn follows a recent song release, "Get Off My Phone," and the first part of their tour season, which spanned North America. In three weeks, the duo will start their Europe and UK tour.

Although The Driver Era became an official band in 2018, Rocky and Ross had musical experience many years before. The brothers originally performed in the band R5 alongside their sister Rydel and brothers Riker and Ryland from 2009 to 2018.

Earlier in his career, Ross acted for Disney in the roles of Austin Moon in *Austin & Ally* from 2011 to 2016 and Brady in the *Teen Beach Movie* series. Ross also starred in the 2017 movie, "My Friend Dahmer," as Jeffrey Dahmer.

Preparations behind the Fall Concert are meticulous and take almost all year to prepare, according to Wheeler. Weeks after the show, UPC begins preparing the next act and how the concert can be better the next year.

Wheeler explained the timeline for selecting an act and setting up the Fall Concert. After the concerts, UPC members debrief the event and discuss what can be done differently and what can remain. By mid-November, UPC creates a list of ten artists they think students want to see.

UPC sets out to make an offer after all changes are made and an artist is picked. UPC sent an offer to The Driver Era in January, who later accepted.

Throughout the year, UPC works with GPAC, which has a hospitality team, to create an environment suitable for the students and artists. From January to May, UPC met with GPAC monthly, and during the summer, they met weekly.

During the GPAC meetings, they form plans for physical tickets, how many seats are needed for VIP attendees and what the artists need.

UPC attempts to ensure that the act can be announced during stadium movie night in the Spring, so marketing and a secure act are necessary.

Marketing includes social media announcements, announcements at Camp War Eagle and the stadium announcement.

"We pretty much got to reach every freshman and tell them about our concert and then we got to reach about 1000 to 1200 people at our stadium movies. There's kind of a lot about the pre-planning process like I said, it starts early and we work all throughout the year. Pretty much the Fall Concert never sleeps because as soon as we finish the

old one, we're working on the next one," Wheeler explained.

UPC announced the 2024 headliner at the April movie screening of "The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes" on the jumbo screen at the Jordan-Hare Stadium.



[View this post on Instagram](#)

A post shared by Auburn UPC (@auburnupc)

"BEST NEWS EVER," wrote a commenter under UPC's July post about The Driver Era. Another wrote, "So excited!!!!"

A week before the concert, UPC announced on Instagram a giveaway for four VIP tickets and four meet and greet tickets for the concert.

The "pre-party" began at 4:30 p.m. Students grabbed tickets and t-shirts while waiting for the lineup announcement to get into GPAC. Students filed into the amphitheater at around 6:00 p.m.

Rachel Robertson, UPC's Vice President of Programming, appreciated getting to see the UPC and GPAC's work be rewarded with a large turnout.

"We're really excited that The Driver Era is bringing in this crowd, and we're just excited for GPAC to just have this big audience," Robertson said.



[Luca Flores](#) | Photo Editor

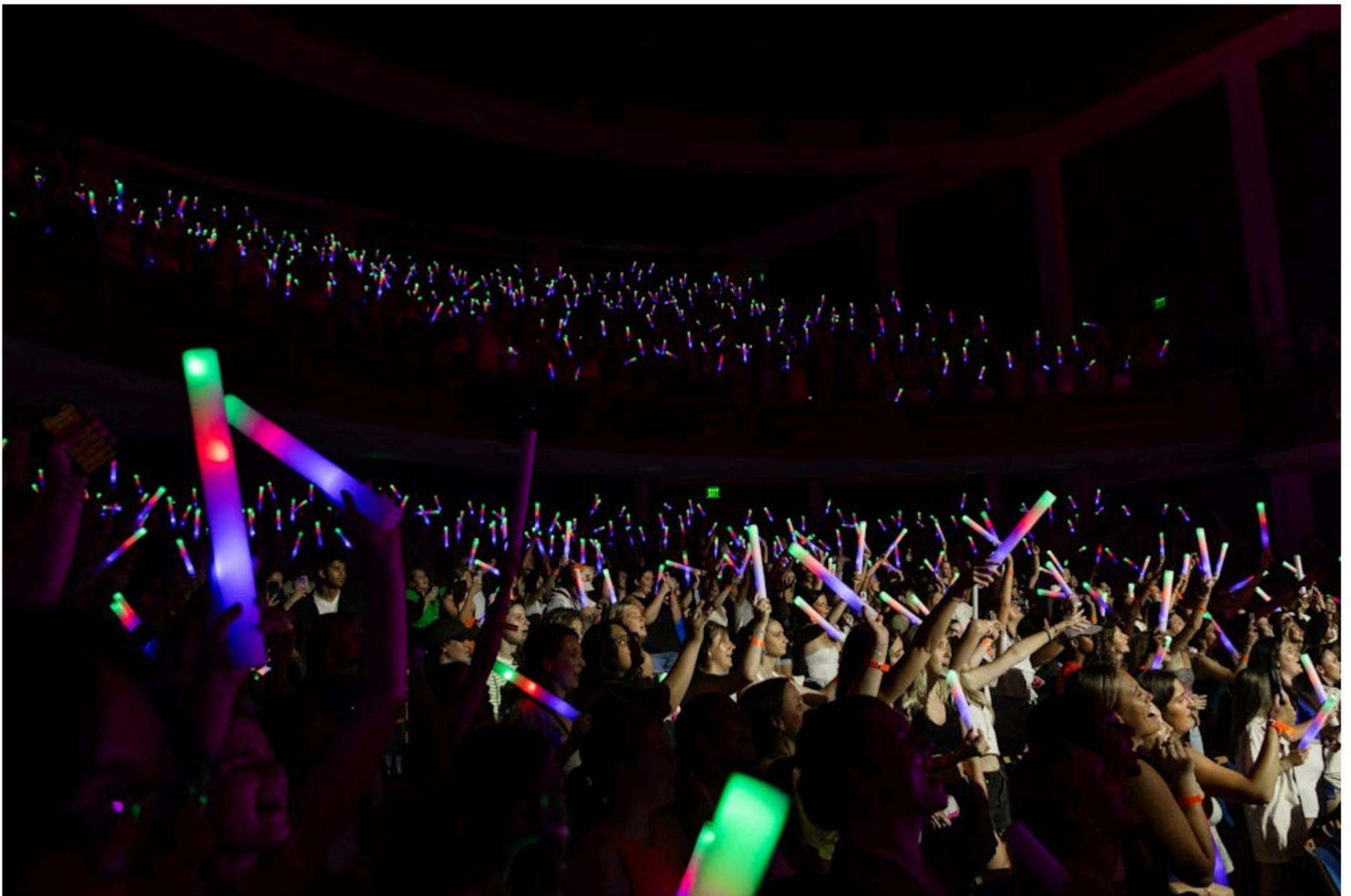
Students make their way into the Gouge Performing Arts Center before UPC's Fall Concert on August 24, 2024.

Friends Ashley Augustine, junior in elementary education, and Christina Lim, junior in environmental design, waited outside of GPAC since noon the day of the concert. The fans brought a poster with a camera in the middle and the words "Steal Our Phone," a play on The Driver Era's recently released song, "Get Off My Phone."

Energy traversed throughout GPAC, with the quick steps of students finding seats close to the stage echoing throughout. Students squealed in delight with friends when they succeeded in the hunt for the front rows.

Based in Athens, Ga., the band Roommate opened for The Driver Era. Members Dulain Willis, Alec Siek, Austin Frederkin and Cole Johnson performed covers including, "Kiwi" and "Valerie." The band also performed an original single, "August Blues" with the help of Susannah Hicks.

After Roommate performed, students had a 10-minute intermission to use the restroom, take pictures and move about GPAC freely. During the intermission, UPC members handed each attendee a foam light-up stick. After, two of the UPC council members entered the stage to reinvigorate the audience for The Driver Era.



[Luca Flores](#) | Photo Editor

The crowd at the Gouge Performing Arts Center during UPC's Fall Concert on August 24, 2024

Screams pierced the amphitheater as time passed and anticipation quickly grew. In seconds, Ross, Rocky, Riker Lynch and their band members rushed the stage and began with their first song, "Keep Me Up at Night."

"It's gonna be a fun time tonight, what's up Auburn," Ross echoed into the microphone after finishing their first song. "This is our first time here- we've been all over the place, but I don't think we've ever been to Auburn though. I don't know if anybody has ever told you, but this place gives hella Disneyland vibes."

Throughout the night, the brothers interacted with fans up close and spoke to the audience between songs. The band's set included other songs, "Feel You Now," "Preacher Man," "Rumors," "Afterglow" and "Malibu."



[Luca Flores](#) | Photo Editor

The Driver Era headlines UPC's Fall Concert on August 24, 2024.

The Driver Era finished with "Get Off My Phone" and "A Kiss." Students cheered loudly as the band took a bow and thanked the audience for their energy.

In the halls, students chattered about the concert and slowly left. Outside, some students waited in hopes of catching the brothers exiting the venue.

Deniscia Rankine, graduate student in the marriage and family therapy master's program, attended one of The Driver Era's concerts two years ago and was over the moon to see them perform again.

"I think they're just amazing performers, to be honest. They really know how to work a stage and make a crowd be engaged throughout the entire concert," Rankine said. "That's what I loved the first time I went and it became my favorite concert I've been to."

Rankine left with a beaming smile and Riker's guitar pick.

Winners of the meet and greet met at the first-floor concession stand and entered a private room to meet with the band.

Myrna Jalkh, junior in architectural design and Avery Robitzsch, junior in biomedical science pre-med both got to meet The Driver Era after winning meet-and-greet tickets through UPC's scavenger hunt.

Jalkh has been a fan of The Driver Era since 2022, and Robitzsch explained that although she didn't know much about the band before the concert, she became a huge fan after the performance and meet and greet.

The friends explained that they got a photo with the brothers and spoke to them.

"They're very down to earth. It's very much like being with friends," said Robitzsch.

“I took a photo with Ross and I asked him to smile with his teeth and he smiled so big. I also loved the openers,” said Jalkh. “When Roommate played ‘Kiwi,’ that was hype. [I think] maybe my favorite part was offering his brother Riker a campus tour because I’m a student recruiter, and he was like ‘Alright, well we leave at 5:30 [a.m.]’ and I was like ‘I’ll be there in front of Samford 4:45 [a.m.]!’”

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**Ella Walton | Newsletter Editor**

*Ella Walton, majoring in English literature with a minor in creative writing, currently serves as the Newsletter Editor at The Auburn Plainsman. Formerly the Culture Editor, Walton has been with The Auburn Plainsman since the fall of 2023.*



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