Alphonso and the band The Collective take to stages in northeast Pennsylvania about three nights a week.

PHOTO COURTESY OF KERMIT ALPHONSO
"I’VE BEEN SINGING MY WHOLE LIFE," SAYS Kermit Alphonso Douglas ’94. “My mom says I popped out singing!” He came to Wilkes University to play basketball but is now the lead singer of Wilkes-Barre’s popular band The Collective.

The Collective has opened for a wide variety of nationally recognized bands: Grammy Award-winning hip-hop group The Roots, Bob Marley and the Wailers, Nick Lachey, Drake Bell and Ja Rule. “We play music that everybody can get into,” says Alphonso, who often drops the name “Douglas” to make things simple. “We’re flexible. We cross over. We’re fortunate.”

The band began on the Wilkes campus as the three-man singing group Smooth Enuf. The group achieved some success, Alphonso says, landing a recording contract and moving to California. Things didn’t go as well as they’d hoped; they returned home and went their separate ways a year later.

“It was a very sad experience for me, but I knew I still loved to perform, and I wasn’t done,” he explains. The Collective then formed and began to write and play music throughout the region.

“The spirit and the idea continue to move forward with me,” he says. “Now my full-time job is being an entertainer.” The Collective plays covers and originals — a mixture of rhythm and blues, soul and hip-hop. They take stage in clubs around northeastern Pennsylvania about three times a week. The band has had some success, receiving awards for best local original band and best local cover band.

In addition to fronting The Collective, Alphonso stays busy with solo projects. His extended play Diaries of a Bar Star Volume I was recently self-released with the song “Last Call for Alcohol,” a most-requested single on WKRZ-FM. Through his new web-based business, Suburban Project Entertainment, he plans to bring exposure to the original music of unsigned artists. Downloadable tracks will be made available for sale via Urban Music Access Key cards sold at clubs. The site will formally launch in the fall via www.wedotunes.net. For now, original songs by The Collective can be downloaded there.

“Making something out of nothing,” Alphonso says. “That’s what I do. I got a good base by going to Wilkes. By meeting the people I met there, I became the free thinker I am today.”

He visited bigger schools before choosing Wilkes. “I realized you’re just a number there,” he explains, noting that he wanted to be involved at the university he attended. “I’m from the South. I wanted to go to a place I’d never been before,” he says. “It was an opportunity to grow up, a way to explore.”

At Wilkes, the Greensboro, N.C., native received a Minority Student Cultural Scholarship and went on to double-major in sociology and criminal justice. After graduation, though, he wanted to be an artist-entertainer. All those years in the gospel choir as a kid kicked in. “My education gave me something that no one can take away,” Alphonso says. “My professors and school administration were great. They were polishing me up. I thank them all. They taught me how to be a gentleman.”

Alphonso notes that he and Robb Brown, who also attended Wilkes for a time, sometimes perform together at Fuse Club and Café, Wilkes-Barre, as The Robb and Kermit Show. Fuse is owned by fellow alumnus Ronald Romanoski ’95.

Alphonso considers Wilkes-Barre home now. “We’ve been trying to create a community here. We’ve been trying to stick together and help each other out, network with each other. We’re just trying to grow something.”

Kermit Alphonso Douglas
Wilkes-Barre, Pa.
B.A., Sociology and Criminal Justice 1994
Career: Lead singer for popular regional band The Collective
Notable: The Collective will perform for Homecoming 2007 festivities from 7 to 11 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 6, in the Henry Student Center.