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RDU offers music to move you

MORRISVILLE -- As travelers crested the escalators at Raleigh-Durham International Airport on Tuesday, they looked pleasantly confused.

What they were hearing wasn't canned elevator music, but a live, two-man band in Terminal 1.

"I was checking in and I thought it was the PA system," said J.P. Driscoll, an Elon University student who was awaiting a flight home to Boston. "But I was so surprised they'd be playing Jeff Beck."

Day one of RDU's annual holiday music series got off to a mellow start. The program, which started in the late 1980s as a way to relax stressed holiday travelers, runs through Nov. 29 and again from Dec. 20 through Dec. 24.

"People are so appreciative - they don't expect to hear [live] music at the airport," said Bo Lankenau, a local musician who has played the gig the past five years.

The baggage claim area off the main parking deck was relatively empty mid-morning as Lankenau and Steven Coon harmonized on guitar for four hours, broken up by an hour lunch break.

"It's soothing for travelers," Greg Lukowski, who was greeting his mother from Connecticut, said as the early Thanksgiving crowd - distracted by cell phones, departure and arrival screens and baggage handles - shuffled by.

And it was a nice change for those who spend more than just travel time in the airport.

Transportation Security Administration officer David Maire was waiting to start his shift when the melody moved him. He bopped to the beat.

"It's better than the grind of the escalator," fellow officer Seth Isaac said.

The airport has featured all kinds of performers since the holiday program was started, including one group that proved too raucous for indoors. "We try to keep it so it doesn't overwhelm the passengers," said Mindy Hamlin, RDU's spokeswoman. "That's why the tubas are in the garage."

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