

The Waxwings @ The Barking Spider Tavern 11/9/2006

After a minute into their innocent singsong romp of "How dry I am," it was apparent that the Waxwings can make an audience soar. This old-time trio of twins Laura and Lisa Cyrocki and singer-songwriter Pete McDonald debuted to an attentive packed house at The Barking Spider Tavern in University Circle on Thursday November 9.

Their clear renditions of traditional old-time songs and modern tunes with an old-timey flavor kept the audience focused, and sometimes giggling and singing along. An entertaining history to each tune was given by McDonald, who is from Chardon Ohio, or by one or another of the Cyrocki sisters in their upper Midwestern inflection. They are from Jackson Michigan.

To the benefit of listeners here, all are now Clevelanders. Only McDonald has played professionally before and he recorded an album, "Here and Gone," which was released in 2005 at the Beachland Ballroom. They honed their act while entertaining shoppers on Saturdays in the past year or so at the Coit Road Farmers Market in East Cleveland.

The Waxwings gained their name last summer when a friend asked them to play for her wedding at a little country church in the Catskill Mountains in New York State. "We all have an affinity for a bird called the Cedar Waxwing. It is a stunning bird and native to this region," said Laura.

The Cyrocki duets are sonorous and alluring. The twins have been singing together most of their lives. "We think our range is mezzo-soprano, although we've never had any formal music training to help us understand our voices," said Laura. During the show one of them asked the audience, "Does anyone know someone who can teach us how to yodel?" "Gary Hall," someone shouted. Hall, a folk singer, is a regular act at the Spider.

"Thanks for staying so quiet so you can hear us," said one of the sisters to the audience. Their captivating tunes kept us attuned. "Who'll rock that cradle when you're gone...I'll sing your song when your gone," go lyrics to the, "Red Rocking Chair," a song about love gone amuck which was first recorded in the 1920's under the title "Sugar Babe," by banjo player Dock Boggs. For anyone who's ever lost a lover, feeling wells up hearing the haunting banjo tune, "Undone in Sorrow," by Ola Bell Reed.

Other tunes included: "Could You Love Me One More Time, (written by Carter Stanley of the famous bluegrass playing Stanley Brothers and arranged by the Lonesome Sisters); The Legend of Sleepy Hollow Bill, (arranged by the Girls of the Golden West); Red Clay Halo, (by Gillian Welch and David Rawlings); Like a Songbird That Has Fallen, (by T-Bone Burnett and Bobby Neuwirth and recorded by the Reeltime Travellers for the movie "Cold Mountain.")

Old-time music evolved in the Appalachian Mountains early in the 19th Century. While its roots are in folk ballads from the British Isles, it developed into a uniquely American form of music. A typical old-time song has a lead fiddle playing melody accompanied by guitar and banjo.

Lisa plays an old parlor-style guitar from the 30's, and her grandfather's old carpenter saw. Laura plays a 125-year-old banjo, and Pete plays fiddle, mandolin, guitar and harmonica. All do vocals and play around with close vocal harmonies.

Someone in the audience quietly told a friend, "sweet." It was two days after an election that most there were probably happy about. A big guy in the back of the room shouted, "That's sweeter than a Blackwell cake with Rumsfeld frosting." The audience roared.

The Waxwings will play this Thursday (November 16) on WRUW 91.1 FM at 9 p.m. on the show, "When the Roses Bloom Again." They are also scheduled to play at the Lakewood Phoenix Café, 15108 Detroit Road (216-226-4401) at 8 p.m. Friday December 15th and a family concert there at 3 p.m. Sunday January 14th, and at the Hanna Perkins School, 19910 Malvern Rd. in Shaker Heights (216-991-9472, ext. 102) they'll be doing a children's concert at 1 p.m. on Saturday January 20th. McDonald has a web site at www.petemcdonaldmusic.com.

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