

Listening Local

Sister Duo Performs Canadian Celtic Music

By LUKE VOSE



All music is shaped in some way by geography. Caribbean music might bring to mind sunshine and bright colors. Norwegian black metal conjures im-

ages of cold, sunless winters. Rap music from Texas is made for cars with big sound systems, since the region is spread apart and driving is such a big part of the lifestyle.

Geographic influence is especially strong for Cassie and Maggie MacDonald, a Celtic roots duo from Nova Scotia, Canada, who will be performing at the Woods Hole Community Hall this Sunday at 8 PM as part of the Woods Hole Folk Music Society's 2016-17 concert season.

The sisters grew around the tightly knit traditional music scene, learning to play piano, guitar, fiddle and to step dance. At a relatively young age (Cassie is 25 and Maggie is 23), they've had an impressive career, winning multiple awards and touring North America and Europe.

They are currently touring the Northeast to promote the release of their latest album, "The Willow Collection." I caught up with Cassie on the phone. The duo was at a hotel in West Virginia, where they were spending their day off catching up on e-mails and hopefully getting in some sight-seeing.

Luke Vose: Do you remember the first song you and your sister learned to sing together?

Cassie MacDonald: Yes. We grew up in a very instrumental tradition. That was the music in our house. We really only started singing about four years ago, and it was actually one of the songs from

the Jeff Bridges movie "Crazy Heart." Our concerts used to be all instrumental, and we would throw in a song with singing as a palette cleanser. We have gone 180 degrees and now we sing most of the show and throw in an instrumental here and there. And, of course, we step-dance.

LV: What was the process like making "The Willow Collection?"

CM: It was really fun. We worked with producer Dave Gunning who is also a great singer/songwriter. He's won lots of awards in Canada and is big in the traditional scene. We felt lucky to have a chance to record with him. In the past, when we would make an album, we would go to the studio and record the whole thing in four or five days. This time, due to everyone's schedule, we had to do the songs one session at a time. This gave us time to listen at home and really get a feel for what each song needed. I think it's a more mature sound because of that.

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LV: How does Nova Scotia influence your music?

CM: It's a very tight-knit community, especially Celtic folk music. There is an availability of great musicians, and we all play on each others' records. I wouldn't say it's necessarily competitive but we all feel a responsibility to keep this wonderful legacy alive.

LV: Is there any totally non-traditional/guilty pleasure music that you like to listen to when you are out on the road doing long drives?

CM: Yes. We love Ariana Grande but I wouldn't say it's a guilty pleasure. We really like the bass lines, production and everything. I think all music has a time and a place.

LV: Is this your first time coming to Woods Hole?

CM: No. This is our second time playing for The Woods Hole Folk Music Society. The last time there

was a huge blizzard. We were not sure if we would do the show but about 40 brave souls came out with their snowshoes on. It was great. We are hoping for better weather this time, though!

LV: Why do you think Celtic folk music is so enduring and still resonates today?

CM: The incredible sense of authenticity. It's coming from a long line of people who worked really hard to keep generations connected with traditions of the past. Being surrounded by water is a foundational aspect of our culture. We are steeped in that tradition and that sense of identity of where we come from. People hear that in the music, and they can feel it.

This Sunday at 8 PM Cassie and Maggie bring that tradition to town, performing at the Woods Hole Community Hall, 68 Water Street. Admission to the concert is \$20 (\$17 for members; discounts for seniors, youth, and children). Doors open at 7:30 PM.





Sisters Cassie and Maggie MacDonald will perform Canadian Celtic music at the Woods Hole Community Hall on November 20. The 8 PM show is part of the Woods Hole Folk Music Society's 2016-2017 season.