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HEAR THIS: CENTENNIAL SOUNDS

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The Colorado music scene keeps growing and deepening. But what bands are worth a spot on your busy social schedule this winter? We suggest you see these local acts drawing national attention before the crowds get too big and the tickets too expensive.

Ragged Union

A contender for the title of Colorado's next great bluegrass band, Ragged Union, led by husband-wife duo Geoff and Christina Union, is a nimble-fingered outfit deftly pushing the boundaries of traditional sounds. Taking turns on lead vocals and with Geoff on guitar, they're supported by a cast of known names, including award-winning mandolinist Jordan Ramsey, banjo player Chris Elliott, formerly of Spring Creek, bassist David Richey of the Billy Pilgrims and fiddler Justin Hoffenberg, a Rockygrass Academy instructor and former member of Long Road Home.

In late October, the band released its second full-length record, "Time Captain." The tightly crafted effort provides a captivating snapshot of the sextet's well-rounded acoustic prowess, from the heartbreak ballad "Leaving Town" to the expansive country-funk of the title track.

See Them: Ragged Union will play an album release show at Swallow Hill Music in Denver on November 11.

The Yawpers

Garage-blues power trio the Yawpers emerged from Denver in 2011 with a bass-less, two-guitar-and-drums attack that combines scuzzy punk freakouts, dirty rockabilly grooves and primitive Delta callbacks. Their second effort for the venerable insurgent country label Bloodshot Records, "Boy in a Well," was produced by Tommy Stinson of the Replacements, and accordingly, the record melds moments of both blurry angst and ragged, tuneful glory.

The concept album features a tragic story conceived by lead singer Nate Cook about a mother who abandons her baby in World War I-era France. It's a heady premise, and one that's a little hard to follow through the record's 12 tunes, but the band keeps things compelling by bringing together a variety of genres and a raw edge. With a versatile voice, Cook yelps, howls, croons and growls, taking his band through everything from lo-fi ballads ("Room with a View") to primal roadhouse screamers ("Face to Face to Face"). While dark in lyrical content, the jangly surf-pop closer "Reunion" strikes an uplifting sonic disposition, a relieving finish to an album bristling with anxious energy.

See Them: After a cross-country tour supporting the new effort, The Yawpers will play a hometown show at the Oriental Theater on December 31.

Tennis

Another married couple making music together, Alaina Moore and Patrick Riley have crafted four albums of sunny indie pop with retro leanings as Tennis. The duo's latest record, "Yours Conditionally," came out in March. Like past work, the most recent effort was inspired by a sailing trip they took together—this one a journey from San Diego to Mexico's Sea of Cortez. As Riley told NPR: "For us, disconnecting is a huge part of the writing process."

Indeed, the band excels at stripping songs down to an emotional core, with thought-provoking lyrics and infectious melodies always front and center. Moore's powerfully sweet voice has a piercing effect on the 70s-style soul ballad "In the Morning I'll Be Better," and in "Ladies Don't Play Guitar" she adds some sarcastic social commentary to a dance tune with breezy swagger.

See Them: After warming up stages for the likes of Haim, Spoon and the Shins, they're starting to headline big rooms on their own. Hear them for yourself at their Ogden Theatre show on January 6.

Meadow Mountain

Meadow Mountain had a darn good summer. The group took first at the annual Rockygrass Band Competition and third at the band comp at the Telluride Bluegrass Festival. Two Vail high school buddies, Jack Dunlevie and Summers Baker, formed the band while/after busking at a local farmer's market during a summer home from college. As they honed their chops and learned new songs, additional band members joined. The group, now rounded out by banjo picker George Guthrie, fiddler Ian Parker and