



Training pays off for bluegrass wunderkinds

By Wade Coggeshall

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— Music is a common denominator in the Grimes house.

Mother Terri has long been a piano player. Father Sherin often sings in church. Daughter Shannon and son Adam also played piano.

So it was only natural that Kathleen and Natalie, their two youngest children, would follow in their footsteps. But they've not only emulated, they've surpassed.

Known as "Kat" and "Nat" to those closest to them, the Grimes sisters have undergone classical training for years. Growing up in tiny Hope, they both performed in the nearby Columbus Symphony Orchestra — Kat the flute and Nat the violin. Also a pianist, Kat has been a three-time semi-finalist in the World Piano Competition.

It was about a year and a half ago that the two, both homeschooled, started performing bluegrass.

"We thought it would be fun, and sure enough we got addicted," Nat, 15, says.

Kat, 17, adds, "We both enjoy classical music, but bluegrass is more relaxed."

Their previous training has aided them immensely in their present endeavors. With Kat on guitar and Nat on fiddle, not only can they proficiently whip up a down-home storm, they can improvise with the best. It's not uncommon for them to flummox some of the most seasoned musicians at festivals and competitions.

"I've been told, 'I don't know how you played that,'" Nat says. "I think, 'cool, that's what I want.' I don't want to play like everyone else."

That classical background, which includes years of musical theory, has given them the skills to excel at any instrument they try.

"I feel like it's all coming to fruition for them now," Terri says.

The Grimes sisters don't claim to be masters of anything they do, though.

"There's always a learning phase with any instrument, and I'm always learning every time I practice," Nat says.

Maybe, but they're already good enough to impress those who know. She's only been playing fiddle for a year and a half, but Nat managed to take second place in the junior division of this year's Indiana State Fair Fiddle Contest. Both won first in the adult division at Avon Heritage Festival's talent contest.

"We've had people come up and say, 'Remember us when you're famous,'" Nat says.

Maybe it's the fact they're sisters that gives them an unfair advantage. A smile, slight nod, or split-second glance is all they need to communicate a stylistic shift mid-song. Such telepathic exchanges don't often come without a lot of work.

"Music has definitely brought us closer together," Nat says. "It wasn't unusual for us to fight when we were younger. Now we've learned how to work together."

Whatever their level of expertise, the Grimeses aren't necessarily in it for prestige. True, Nat lends her violin talents to the new Hendricks Symphony Orchestra, and you can find the sisters at virtually any regional bluegrass festival during the summer with their band from Hope, Possum Glory Train. But they'll play for anyone just about anywhere.

They perform regularly at their church, Plainfield Bible Church. They've taken up something of a residency at the Woodfire Grill in Plainfield. There are a couple of Scottish festivals on the calendar this winter. A recent performance entertained veterans at a reunion of the 2nd Air Service Squadron of the 5th Air Force Division.

Weddings are a common gig too. They're performing this weekend at their 84-year-old grandfather's nuptials. Kat "loves playing wherever we get audience participation."

"As long as they're having fun, it doesn't matter how we do," she said.

With all of their education and experience, the Grimes family is cognizant of music's transformative power. "For me, it's watching other people enjoy themselves that brings me the greatest joy," Terri says. "You never know how people are coming to listen to the music, what problems they may be bringing. Hopefully you bring them some joy."

One of Nat's most memorable experiences was of a woman who cried during one of her waltzes. Afterwards the woman told her it revived memories of a friend who had died.

"That's what I love about music," Nat says. "It can remind you of things or lighten you up."

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