

The Boxcar Lilies hook up to sweet, three-part harmonies

CD release party Saturday, at St. James Church in Greenfield

There is nothing like great three-part harmonies to send a shiver up your spine and create goose bumps on your skin. It is one of the loveliest musical sounds you can hear and when we think of great harmonies in the contemporary roots music world, we think of bands like The Wailin' Jennys or Red Molly. We can now add The Boxcar Lilies to the list.

The trio of Jenny Goodspeed on guitar and ukulele, Stephanie Marshall on guitar and percussion and Katie Clarke on banjo and guitar has an appealing, rootsy take on music. But even more than their musicianship or strong songwriting, it's the band's stunning harmonies that is at the heart of its appeal.

The Lilies will be one of the many local band's to perform at the Green River Festival this year. As excited as they are to play that event, at the moment, all their energy is focused on their upcoming CD release show for their debut album "Heartwood."

The show will be held at St. James Church, 8 Church St., Greenfield on Saturday, April 2, at 7 p.m.

Joining the Lilies will be some of the musicians that performed on the album: producer Dave Chalfant on bass, Jim Henry on dobro and guitar, "Papa" John Alphin on mandolin and Rick Mauran on percussion.

The Boxcar Lilies formed in 2009 and prior to becoming a band were all established musicians in their own right. Clarke of Conway is the most rooted in bluegrass and was leader of Katie Clarke and the Green River Band. Marshall, who lives in Greenfield, has a background in rock, and Goodspeed, who lives in Ashfield, worked as a singer-songwriter in the classic mold of 1970s-era songwriters like Joni Mitchell.

While the three women have very different musical backgrounds and tastes, what they have in common is a shared love of good songwriting and great harmonies.

They came together via their mutual involvement in the Franklin County Musical Collective known as the Coop. At the time that Goodspeed joined the Coop, Marshall and Clarke were already good friends who sometimes sang together.

"Two years ago, at the Coop's winter concert, Stephanie was saying, 'You've got to listen to this woman Jenny! She joined the Coop this year and she is amazing. She will blow you away and I think we should sing with her,'" recalled Clarke.

"I loved singing harmony and when I met these guys and found we had this common interest, it was, like, 'Oh my gosh! We have to do this,'" added Goodspeed.



Sheryl Hunter

Sounds Local



The opportunity came when Goodspeed was chosen to be part of the Falcon Ridge Emerging Artist Showcase and needed some backup singers. She turned to Clarke and Marshall to join her.

The first time they took the stage together, magic happened.

"We all knew right then that this was the beginning of something sweet and beautiful," Marshall said.

"It was happening for all of us," said Clarke. "I have sung with many people and Steph and I have sung together and suddenly, with Jenny in the mix, it was like blown-away magic. And that's not something that comes along every day."

"When we sang harmony, it sort of created this sound that was greater than the sum of its parts. For some reason, the tone of our voices combined makes this really magical sound and when you get that goose-bump kind of feeling from singing, that's really special," Goodspeed said.

The women didn't hesitate to put their ongoing careers on the back burner to dive in and form a band.

"I secretly hoped that this would become something that we would spend all our time on. I was willing to wait for Katie and Stephanie to come around because I wasn't feeling particularly fulfilled as a solo artist," said Goodspeed.

It turned out that she didn't have to wait very long.

"It was easy for me to let go of a solo career because I was lonely," said Marshall. Clarke also found that the project instantly appealed to her.

"I was on board from the beginning," Clarke said. "The idea of playing with two other women and spending a lot of time coming up with arrangements, which is one of my favorite things in the world to do, and doing kind of bluegrass stuff — I knew that

Stephanie and I would work well together and that just getting to know Jenny, who has the most amazing ear for harmonies and arrangements, that was the deal breaker for me. It was very exciting."

In November of 2009, as the trio sat around a local pub listening to the sounds of Pat and Tex LaMountain and eating a plate of nachos, they settled on the name The Boxcar Lilies. Once they ran the name by all the other pub patrons and got their vote of approval, the band was officially born.

Right from the start, the Lilies started winning over audiences with their bluegrass-influenced songs, their vocal harmonies and their easy-going stage manner.

Their chemistry goes beyond the music as the three are close friends who share a strong respect for each other, an element that Clarke says has been instrumental in their success. Last spring, the band joined forces with producer Dave Chalfant and holed up in his Sackamusic studio in Conway to record "Heartwood." The project was financed by funds raised by fans who pre-ordered the disc.

"Heartwood," which features nine originals and a cover of Neil Young's "Old Man," has the potential to open even more doors for The Boxcar Lilies. For the rest of the year, the band will be touring throughout the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states. They plan to remain smart in terms of their approach toward touring, however. "We aren't about to jump in the back of a tour van and travel across the country for coffee money," said Clarke. "It has to make sense and remain fun."

Having fun is a big part of what The Boxcar Lilies are about. You can tell by watching the three women on stage that they love what they are doing and this enthusiasm will be in full bloom at the CD release show when they get the rare chance to be backed by a full band. This is a not-to-miss show!