

Belleville Outfit releases Wanderin'

Young stars of MerleFest 2007 ready to go nationwide in 2008

By Jeff Eason

One of the bands that made the biggest splash at last year's Merle Watson Festival was the young sextet the Belleville Outfit. The band was put together the week before the festival and, after two marathon rehearsals, wowed audiences on the Americana and Hillside stages.

Many miles and many live shows later the Belleville Outfit is ready to go nationwide. This month will see the release of the band's debut studio album, *Wanderin'*. The album captures the band's youthful exuberance while exploring a variety of musical elements such as old swing jazz, country, blues, Americana and pop. Along the way the band is defining its musical territory as being somewhere between New Orleans and Austin (two hometowns of the band's six members).

The Belleville Outfit includes Rob Teter on guitar, lead and harmony vocals, Phoebe Hunt on violin, lead and harmony vocals, Jonathan Konya on drums, Connor Forsyth on piano and organ, Jeff Brown on upright acoustic bass, and Marshall Hood on lead guitar and harmony vocals.

Considering that all of the members of the band are in their early twenties, the sextet brings an amazing wealth of musical experience to the stage as The Belleville Outfit. When Teter and Hood's former group, The DesChamps Band of Spartanburg, S.C., was offered a slot at MerleFest 2007, the duo recruited the rest of the musicians for the gig and named the band "Belleville" after the Django Rheinhardt song of the same name. In the months after MerleFest, The Belleville Outfit has performed for over 10,000 people and has shared the stage with the Del McCurry Band, the Waybacks, Mark O'Connor and the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band.



The Belleville Outfit's Phoebe Hunt and Marshall Hood on the Americana Stage at MerleFest 2007. Photo by Jeff Eason

Wanderin' was recorded at Ocean Way Studios and Warm Front Studios in Nashville with help from musical titans Bill Vorndick and John Rees.

Teter sings the lead on most of the songs on *Wanderin'* and he brings a cool Cajun croon to the microphone, reminiscent of the Red Stick Ramblers' Linzay Young.

Hunt's sassy jazzy vocal delivery is perfect when she takes the lead vocals on songs such as "Wonder Why" and "Warm Summer's Evening." A duel threat on vocals and violin (she's won Daniel Pearl Foundation honors on the instrument), Hunt shifts into high gear on the swing standard "It's a Good Day" as she belts out the lyrics then tears up the strings with a fantastic lead.

All of the instrumental performances are fabulous and many feature synchronized lead work between violin, guitar and piano. Lyrically, *Wanderin'* is a close cousin of the Avett Brothers' latest album *Emotionalism* in that it features young Americana stars unafraid to sing some love songs.

Eileen McClelland of The Houston Chronicle noted, "The Belleville Outfit takes pieces of gypsy swing, classic jazz, big band and Americana and stitches them together into an improvisational quilt of musical idiosyncrasy. Somehow it all makes sense in the capable hands of this young band whose members draw on influences as diverse as their hometowns."

While *Wanderin'* doesn't quite capture the intensity and instrumental improvisation of a Belleville Outfit live show, it is evidence of what this wonderfully talented young band can accomplish in the recording studio. The Belleville Outfit's new album will come to a record store near you starting February 5, 2008. To find out more about the band, visit www.bellevilleoutfit.com.