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The Belleville Outfit

SXSW Picks 2 Click 2008

By Jim Caligiuri

"They call me Grandma," frowns Belleville Outfit fiddler and vocalist Phoebe Hunt. "All the guys in the band are 21, and I'm 23."

In spite of the members' ages, the sextet is one of Austin's most musically accomplished and adventuresome, mixing gypsy swing, big-band jazz, a touch of bluegrass, and some Walter Hyatt covers into a unique mix that flows like a whiskey river.

The youthful ensemble's roots are grounded in the same place as Uncle Walt's, Spartanburg, S.C., where singer-songwriter Rob Teter, guitarist Marshall Hood (Champ's nephew), and upright-bass player Jeff Brown started out as the Deschamps Band.

"By the time they were 17, they were playing hours of Uncle Walt's Band's music," Hunt chimes. "That's how they learned their instruments."

Upon graduating from high school, Teter enrolled at Loyola University in New Orleans along with pianist Connor Forsyth and drummer Jonathan Konya. Early in 2007, the defunct Deschamps Band was offered a gig at Merlefest, Doc Watson's annual spring jamboree in North Carolina. Teter contacted Hood, who was then in Austin, about rehearsing in the Big Easy. Hood brought along Hunt, and after two days of marathon rehearsals, the lineup solidified.

"After Merlefest, things got so busy it was impossible for us to be in New Orleans and have Phoebe and Marshall in Austin," Teter explains. "We were driving and flying back and forth. We were just digging ourselves a hole moneywise, so we made the decision to come to Austin in September. It was a wonderful decision, but it's been a series of really impulsive things that brought this band together."

Since September, the group has been through a whirlwind of tours and recording sessions. They've just self-released their debut, *Wanderin'*, recorded with the legendary Bil VornDick (Alison Krauss, Béla Fleck) in Nashville, to positive reviews nationally. The road's also been treating them well.

"I was afraid of how we were going to be received in Austin after we've been so well received everywhere else," Hunt, ever the elder statesman, muses. "I thought it would be hard to play to an empty room here when we play for a full crowd in other places. Part of it is really humbling, but I thought it'd be good for them."

SXSW showcase: Saturday, March 15, 10pm @ Jovita's

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