

The Growlers Are Coming!

The Random Canyon Growlers, a bluegrass band created by two friends from Randolph, has been the talk of the town for two years in the Jackson Hole area of Wyoming and Idaho.

Now, the Growlers are returning to Vermont for a one-night-only concert at Chandler Music Hall in Randolph on Tuesday, July 20 at 7:30 PM. Sharing the stage will be Katie Trautz and two members of her band, the Tall Boys.

The Random Canyon Growlers were formed after David McMeekin and Jamie Drysdale moved west, in the fall of 2008, with two firm ideas – to do a lot of skiing, and to form a bluegrass band.

It worked. The powder snow was waist-high, and by the next spring, rumors were spreading in Jackson Hole about the two young guys from Vermont who were attracting big crowds at the weekly “Hootenanny,” Jackson's premiere open-mike venue.

Music reviewer Aaron Davis of the Planet Jackson Hole newspaper spent a night at the Hoot to check it out, and he liked what he heard. “I knew that these guys had something special—two voices weaving together with what seemed to be little effort,” he wrote. “It reminded me of the Avett Brothers, who are the closest thing to being the Beatles of folk-grass.”

Music fans responded, too, and attendance at the Hootenanny shot up.

By summer the Random Canyon Growlers were playing events and big weddings throughout the Jackson Hole and Teton Valley area and stepping into Montana and Washington for other gigs.

During the winter of 2009-2010, the band kept up a steady stream of engagements in the three-state region, winning more fans not only with their singing and playing but with their original songs. One of their songs, “Keep Your License Plate Green” introduced westerners to core Vermont icons, including the Tunbridge Fair and Snowsville General Store.

They even shared the stage with another renowned bluegrass musician with Randolph credentials. Ben Winship, the son of the late Tom Winship, spent many summers in Randolph Center and is now the unofficial guru of bluegrass in the Northwest, playing in two bands and running his own recording studio. Winship's band, “Growling Old Men” and the Random Canyon Growlers recently played a joint concert in Jackson. The event, of course, was entitled “A Night of Growling.”

The Growlers have also just recorded their first professional CD at Winship's studio. “We're looking at the July 20 Chandler show as a CD release party as well,” Jamie Drysdale said.

The band continues to get topnotch reviews. Aaron Davis in the Jackson Hole Weekly wrote that the Growlers played better bluegrass than most of the touring professional bands. "I preview a lot of bluegrass bands in this here column," he wrote. "The Random Canyon Growlers ... right here in our backyard, have something timeless, and with its own bag of tunes."

Now the Growlers are heading east for Dave McMeekin's wedding. On July 20, just four days before that big occasion, they will play for Randolph audiences at a gala 7:30 event at Chandler Music Hall. Three members of the Tallboys join the band in a guest appearance.

The Tallboys features fiddle, guitar, banjo, pedal steel and bass and their album "Remembering" was awarded best traditional album of the year by the Times Argus. Some of Vermont's finest musicians comprise the group: Michael Roberts (guitar) of Wooden Dinosaur, Asa Brosious (pedal steel) of Sara Grace and The Suits, Noah Hahn (bass) of Mr. Casual and Mark Legrand and the Lovesick Bandits, and Nate Gusakov (banjo) of Knotty Pine. The band performs as a trio at Chandler featuring Trautz, Hahn and Gusakov.

Trautz is a native Vermont fiddler who has toured the country sharing traditional music and original folk songs. She has released three albums in the past three years under different titles. She plays guitar and banjo, as well, and crosses genres in her numerous ensembles including Mayfly, Wooden Dinosaur, and the House Carpenters Stringband. She is the director of the non-profit Summit School of Traditional Music and Culture based in Montpelier.

The Growlers mix their own songs with a variety of traditional bluegrass numbers. And though they consider their dynamic vocal blend to be the key element, they are also excellent pickers—Drysdale on the guitar and McMeekin on banjo.

In Randolph, they'll be joined by their regular stand-up bass player, Matt Donovan, and California-based mandolin player, Jake Rekedal, a college friend of McMeekin's. Also sitting in for the Randolph concert will be yet another Randolph native, Justin Moore, on fiddle and vocals. Now a resident of Boise, Moore has already played Idaho gigs with the Growlers to great notices.

In order that a large number of the friends of the band may be able to take in their "Randolph Return," Chandler is keeping ticket prices at a low \$12. The Growlers are looking forward to it.

"We all grew up feeling that playing at Chandler Music Hall was a really big deal," Jamie Drysdale said. "To be able to come here and play our music for our friends and community is really a great honor."

"And it will be a LOT of fun for everybody," McMeekin promised.

General admission tickets can be ordered by calling the Chandler Box office between 3 and 6 PM weekdays, 802-728-6464.