

## **Rhythm in the city**

### **Wild Carrot creates their story with folk music**

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In October, Wild Carrot ditched trying to make a living any other way. It was then that the Cincinnati folk duo decided to become full-time musicians and travel around the country, singing, entertaining, writing and trying to make a living with acoustic music. But it makes sense, this path, since the married couple has had music in their lives for a very long time.

Singer/songwriter Pamela grew up with Pete Seeger and Ella Fitzgerald tunes in her home, as well as with family "singing around the campfire kind of" experiences. She grew up to be a classically trained vocalist, singing opera and arias.

"But if you're an opera singer, it's kind of the Met or nothing," she says. Husband Spencer says he has strong roots in folk and guitar, shown off now by his instrumentation and performances on the guitar and mandolin. "We both grew up on rock 'n'roll, too," he adds.

Years ago, the budding musicians met at the Leo Coffeehouse, a 35-year-old hangout founded by Queen City Balladeers in a YMCA basement. Pamela (still in college, at the time) showed up for an open mic set while Spencer worked at the Leo. After some time, Pamela and Spencer became good friends and eventually performed together, but the relationship took a reprieve when Pamela entered the Peace Corps for two years.

"When I came back, I called Spencer for a guitar lessons," she says. "It just developed from there."

Now, with *Defined* (their first CD) to their credit, Wild Carrot tours the country while calling Cincinnati home, performing "original, traditional and contemporary" folk music. Their original songs are an integral part of their success, but jazz and blues might pop up in a set, or maybe some swing songs or classic standards.

"Louie Armstrong said that all music is folk music," says Pamela, explaining their broad playlist. "[Our range] has allowed us to appeal to lots of ages." Pamela and Spencer's gig list is heavy on travel, as they bounce from festival to festival or house concert to bookstore show. They said that the "house concert" circuit is going more underground these days, since folk music's popularity is declining directly with its exposure. But they add that it's fun to play at someone's house, where nothing is advertised and no tickets are formally sold. Some high-labeled artists show at the concerts, which makes it difficult for smaller bands to compete, but they're worth doing--"especially the ones that have dedicated clientele," like in the Northeast or in Texas.

Wild Carrot keep traveling, earning money through concerts and teaching guitar and voice lessons in Cincinnati. Is it all about money? Part of it is, of course, since Wild Carrot says they have to make a living. But they add that they enjoy playing for kids at libraries, for example, because music programs in schools are losing money. Folk music is their route, their path because of the characters and the situations.

"To us, folk music tells a story," says Pamela. "It comes out of life."

Song Inspiration:

Wild Carrot was a finalist in the Kerrville, TX 2000 New Folk Festival, among 32 hand-picked artists competing in the 18-day-long festival's songwriting contest. So how does Wild Carrot get inspiration for their original songs?

"We both read a lot," says Spencer, adding that the two are library fiends. "We're inspired by books and a lot of fiction."

Pamela adds that her own experiences often tangent into a song.

"My songs are slices of life," she says. "I keep a journal, and sometimes a line will catch my eye and work work it's way into a line of a song."

– **Sarah Knott**

