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TALLGRASSEXPRESS STRING BAND musicians

TallgrassExpress.com



IN THE MIDWEST, FOLK AND BLUEGRASS BANDS ARE AN ENTERTAINMENT STAPLE. But to date, none have created such a distinctly native experience as Kansas' Tallgrass Express String Band. Evoking the landscape and time periods of which they sing, they've dedicated their tunes almost entirely to the Flint Hills.

Their sound can best be described as a mix of folk, Western, bluegrass and old-time string band, says Annie Wilson, who plays guitar and sings.

"Our music helps to celebrate the land and people of the Flint Hills," Wilson says. In fact, Kansas Governor Sam Brownback named the singer-songwriter "Flint Hills Balladeer" in January 2013.

Along with string-based acoustics, they focus heavily on vocals, often taking on three-part harmonies. "It really adds versatility to the music," says Wilson, emphasizing the band's dynamics and willingness to perform anywhere for anyone.

Though they've performed covers in the past, the band released its first all-original album, *Clean Curve of Hill Against Sky*, in 2010. Their second album, *Sky & Water, Wind & Grass*, featuring 30 original songs, was recently released. And this year marks their 10th anniversary, after meeting at a Friday night jam session hosted by the Emma Chase Café, in Cottonwood Falls.

"I enjoy being able to bring optimism into people's lives through music. It's something people enjoy, and I'm so happy if I can give them that," Wilson says. "If someone wants to listen I'm glad to play for them."

— Bethaney Wallace

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GRASSROOTSART CENTER visionary arts

grassrootsart.net

THE GRASSROOTS ART CENTER IN LUCAS is on a mission to document, exhibit and preserve the work of "outsider artists" in Kansas and the Midwest.

"These artists are just a different breed of people," says Rosslyn Schultz, executive director of the Grassroots Art Center. They have not had any formal art education or training, but for whatever reason, Schultz says, they have been inspired to create their own works of art. "They truly love what they're doing and they are driven to create."

Schultz adds that examples of outsider art, self-taught visionary art, exist from one end of Kansas to another. She urges people to be aware of such unconventional artwork. "Examples of outsider art can be over the next hill or around the next corner," she says. — Lou Ann Thomas



KANSAS!
MAGAZINE
summer 2014