

April Verch & Cody Walters

To listen to April Verch and Cody Walters is to be immersed in tradition. To watch them perform is to be transported. Be it regional Canadian roots, American old-time, 50's Country, Scandinavian folk music, or something original that sounds as though it's been around for a century—the one common thread is their love and reverence for the music and traditions that have been passed down to them.

This husband and wife duo are a true partnership of kindred musical spirits, each a world-class musician in their own right. Combining their unique backgrounds from Verch's native Ottawa Valley and Walters' heartland roots in Kansas, their music showcases endless creativity and versatility—transitioning effortlessly from traditional Ottawa Valley step dancing and fiddle tunes, to old-time fiddle-banjo duets with tight-knit vocal harmonies, to innovative sandpaper foot percussion, all contrasted against Verch's sweet soprano voice.

Verch and Walters began playing together in 2007 when Walters joined the April Verch Band as bassist. Initially formed as a pickup band centered around Verch's own fiddle and dance stylings in 2000, the band grew and blossomed into an established trio of world-class musicians, spanning several musical traditions and backgrounds, yet all united in their mission to share the music they love.

Together they have traveled to four continents, performed in fourteen countries, and played everywhere from tiny pubs and dusty festival workshops all the way to legendary stages such as the Kennedy Center and the Ryman Auditorium. In 2018—fittingly amidst their ever-busy tour schedule—April and Cody were married.

Circumstances, a number of them, not the least of which was the pandemic, led to Verch and Walters exploring the idea of working as a duo. What the two eventually landed on, was a place where all the aforementioned musical styles and sub-genres, could comfortably inhabit the same space.

“When Cody first joined the band I was listening to old time fiddlers at American festivals and loving it, while Cody was learning old time clawhammer banjo on the road, and practicing that in any of his free time. We started playing and working on fiddle and banjo tunes, which really helped my playing in that style. I also received encouragement and mentorship when we were touring in places like Virginia,” added Verch of a scenario, that in hindsight has been wonderfully organic. “Those early days of playing together really helped shape where we've ended up years later, blending Canadian old time and American old time and Classic Country music.”

With the release of their debut duo album *Passages and Partings* (March 24, 2023,) the collection of 16 songs and tunes adds a new tributary to their musical cannon, and one that Verch and Walters feel, is really starting to blossom.

You can hear the joy and sense of satisfaction when Walters reflects on what they have accomplished in creating *Passages and Partings*.

The multi-instrumentalist and singer feels listeners will hear the focus and the spirit they've developed, right from the album opener, an interpretation of "Ain't Gonna Get No Supper Here Tonight." It's a piece which is built on a driving melody that is nothing short of infectious.

"That's a difficult piece for us to stop playing once we get going, it's just so much fun. That one nails it for me, and I still hear our source recording from Bob Carlin along with the late Pete Sutherland's fiddle in my mind. It's so raw and real," says Walters.

"Our schedule for recording this album was more spread out than usual because we were recording at home rather than 'going into the studio.' There was some late-night recording when traffic had died down or the rain on the roof had finally stopped. That freedom in scheduling effected things in a positive way. We'd get some space from the tunes, listen back, and if necessary be able to take a second shot at some pieces we wanted to approach differently," recalled Walters.

Verch and Walters aren't the only duo stirring the pot on *Passages and Partings*, which also features contributions from a number of their friends and musical peers including Betse & Clarke. Betse Ellis's fierce fiddle work is heard on "Jawbone," this particular version inspired by the playing of Missouri's Gene and Cecil Goforth, while Clarke Wyatt is found on the same track injecting his Norman Blake inspired guitar playing. Ellis's empathetic playing is also featured on the double fiddle track "Sojourn," a tune Ellis co-wrote with Verch.

The Juno award-winning Pharis and Jason Romero brought their significant talents to two songs, "Dear Brother" and "Not To Fall." The foursome created a stunningly beautiful blend of acoustic sounds and voices on these standout tracks.

In the song writing department, "Not To Fall" is one of two pieces Verch co-wrote with highly respected veteran folk singer-songwriter/activist Si Kahn, the other one being "Up In The Ottawa Valley."

"Those co-writes were composed during a weekend in Charlotte, North Carolina after Si had invited me to write with him," says Verch. The superior results are apparent upon first listen. That song writing session was eye opening and an artistic highlight for Verch as she got a first-hand glimpse into Kahn's "process and skill."

Verch also brought two more songs to the project that she co-wrote with the critically acclaimed American songwriter (and previous bandmate) Jon Weisberger. One being the title track "Passages and Partings," the other being "Dear Brother."

For Verch & Walters, taking their music to the stage is another process altogether and the trajectory of live performance is certainly fulfilling for both the duo and their audiences.

“We’re more comfortable with this setting with each passing show and we debrief about the live shows all the time. We’re really finding our comfort zone,” Walters feels, before Verch adds, “you can practice as much as you like, but it’s got to work in front of people, and you don’t know that until you’re performing live and feeling those reactions. It’s such a beautiful experience.”

The virtuoso fiddle player also feels that after having been a bandleader for so many years, it’s really refreshing to be in a duo, “where it’s just April Verch and Cody Walters.”

“It’s a sweet way of being ourselves. We’ve played together for so long, and even though the music is still high energy, I feel like our performances are now a bit more laid back and mature.”

Audience members and music journalists have remarked at their sincerity in sharing stories between tunes. Verch’s delicate voice, energetic footwork, sand paper foot percussion and stunning playing (sometimes combined all at once!) are jaw-dropping. Walters’ melodic banjo stylings, solid rhythm guitar accompaniment and tasteful vocal harmonies are at once understated and brilliant, dueting with Verch’s skills in glorious harmony.

Even now, after more than two decades leading her own band and with 14 albums in her name (two of which were nominated for JUNO Awards), and another 3 collaboration albums, there is nothing that fulfills Verch more than sharing her music with the world. “It’s like the reward for everything else.”

Together, Verch and Walters are exemplary tradition-bearing performers: never forgetting the roots of the music, that connection to the people in the audience or on the dance floor, to the community sparked by a good song.

“It’s about joining together to celebrate everyday life, through music. We’re all in this together.” And so together they press onward: diving deep into musical tradition, bringing people together and forging connections, and sharing their insight and genuine love for the music they play so well.

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