



PHOTO MICHAEL O'LEARY

Meet the Honey Dew Drops in Guilford.

Sweet, high and lonesome

Folk duo Honey Dewdrops drop in at Guilford's Acoustic Music Friday

By Lisa Reisman
Special to the Times

GUILFORD » In March 2008, the phone rang at the Charlottesville, Va. home of Laura Wortman and Kagey Parrish. The caller ID read PRAIRIE HOME COMPANION, St. Paul, MN.

"And we said to each other, 'Isn't it nice of them to take the time to let us know we didn't get into the competition,'" said Parrish, one half of The Honey Dewdrops, the internationally touring, old-time country-playing husband-and-wife duo that will appear at Acoustic Music in Guilford on Friday, March 25.

He and Laura Wortman had met in college in 2003 while playing in a rock band with mutual friends. The band broke up. They stayed together. One reason was the uncanny way their voices complemented each other. Another was their mutual love of bluegrass and traditional music.

"We've always been really drawn to that music because there's a power that is infectious, that makes you want to dance and sing and shout," Parrish said in a recent telephone interview, noting they'd both grown up in the midst of the Blue Ridge mountains.

After marrying, they worked as schoolteachers, "playing and writing music for fun, with the odd gig here and there on weekends, but mostly something we enjoyed so much we kept at it," said Parrish.

In January 2008 they heard an ad about the Prairie Home Companion talent show. They sent a link of their MySpace page and promptly forgot about it.

Then came the call. And a voice telling them that "we'd

love to have you guys come out," Parrish recalled. As it happened, the theme that year was "Talented 20-somethings." (At the time Parrish was 28, Wortman, 24.) They flew to St. Paul and ended up winning the contest.

"It was the scariest thing we'd ever done. It was also a whole lot of fun," Parrish said.

It was, above all, an experience that opened their eyes. They took the school year to decide whether to give full-time music a go. At the end of that year, they were ready for their leap of faith.

Always, Parrish said, there was a fascination with "what you can do in traditional music with just two voices and two instruments." The couple immersed themselves in the high, lonesome sound of the legendary Monroe Brothers; the fragile beauty of the acclaimed duo Kate Brislin and Jody Stecher's mountain ballads; and the sparse Appalachian clarity of all-world musicians Gillian Welch and David Rawlings.

Evidently, those influences had the desired effect. Their first album, "If the Sun Will Shine," recorded live, mixed in a 1920s barn, and released in 2009, had Jeff Royer of Fly Magazine lauding the collection of songs as "capturing something haunting, melancholic, and all-together charming."

A selection as finalists in the 2009 Mountain Stage New Song competition followed, then a second-place finish in the Annual Eddie's Attic Open-Mic Shoot-out Finals, the fabled club and songwriters' sanctuary where musical acts from around the U.S. compete.

Their 2012 release "Silver Lining" reached the top of the Folk DJ charts. Reviewer Christopher Graham praised



PHOTO BY CAREY MURDOCK

The Honey Dew Drops, a husband and wife duo will perform at Acoustic Music.org in Guilford on Friday.

the "unsettling emotional power of its simple arrangements" that suggested "the intimate quality of a married couple huddled around a pot-bellied stove on a winter's night."

All the while, ironically, the Honey Dewdrops were living a nomadic lifestyle, covering stretches of highway from coffee houses to church halls to performance venues to festivals across North America, staying in hotels, and with friends and family.

"We learned that's how it works," Parrish said. "We get paid to do live shows. That's our income."

Of course, it wasn't only business, according to Wortman, 31. "Touring is like collecting images of landscapes, sounds of voices, contents of stories, moods of places and environments," she has said. "It can tell you something about human nature, about how the world works, little by little."

All of which went into their most recent album, "Tangled Country," a collection of 10 originals grooved with tracks conveying hard

times, struggle, loneliness, and melancholy.

Still, infused with Parrish's brilliant and fluid guitar work, Wortman's vocals, described by Folkworks as "one of the most beautiful, authentic voices in folk music today," and the duo's gorgeously blended harmonies, the effect is uplifting.

As Folkworks put it, "the songs themselves feature timeless melodies that sound as if they've always been there, just waiting to be discovered."

That kind of recognition only makes the Honey Dewdrops more invested in their craft. And their journey, as their name suggests, sweeter.

"We got our break out of nowhere, and we went with it, and eight years later, we feel as though we're barely getting started," Parrish said.

The Honey Dewdrops will perform at Acoustic Music at 8 p.m. on Friday, March 25, 1238 Boston Post Road, Guilford. For tickets, \$20, visit acousticmusic.org/event/the-honey-dewdrops or call 203-458-8353.