

# 'Virtuosic foot-stomping bluegrass'

## Roots band Low Lily with world-class mandolinist to light up The Kate

By Lisa Reisman

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OLD SAYBROOK — If you'd like a little pop in your step on one of the shortest and darkest days of the year, Low Lily, which will appear at The Kate on Friday, Dec. 16, is happy to oblige.

The award-winning three-piece American roots band will team up with Grammy-nominated bluegrass mandolinist Matt Flinner, dubbed by Jazz Times as "perhaps the most exciting and creative mandolin player on the scene today," for a Winter Solstice Mini-Fest.

"The Winter Solstice is a dark time when human beings have to make our own light and joy," said founding member Liz Simmons, guitarist and vocalist, described by Red Guitar Music as "an artist with full command of her most precious instrument, her voice."

The deft flatpicking of Flynn Cohen should help. Likewise, fiddler Natalie Padilla, who's won fiddle championships in bluegrass, old time, and Texas fiddle, and negotiates the strings with a flair and energy "that lifted me literally from my seat, feet ready to dance," music reviewer Laura Dapolito wrote of a performance earlier this year.

"Between us, we play mandolins, guitars, fiddle, banjo, and double bass, and sing in three-part vocal harmonies," said Simmons, who said she spent her early childhood "traveling



Contributed photo

**Liz Simmons, Flynn Cohen and Natalie Padilla, of Low Lily, will take the stage at The Kate at 8 p.m. Friday in Old Saybrook.**

through the wild of North America in a sky-blue VW bus" with her itinerant musician parents and her sisters.

"Besides our lullabies, which were traditional songs, our soundtrack was the rock 'n' roll and New Orleans brass music our parents played in the band," she said. When her family settled in rural New Hampshire,

she trained in classical music for a time, then found her way to folk and traditional music.

Along the way, she met and married Flynn Cohen, who found guitar after an injury left him unable to continue his athletic pursuits, and found bluegrass at Dartington College of Arts in England while studying Irish music, she said.

Together they formed the Brattleboro-based Low Lily, named for a northeast woodland flower, distinguishing themselves with "their knack for putting a little pop twist on traditional folk and Americana sound," as PopMatters wrote, and charting two top songs on international folk radio and two Independent Music Awards.

Simmons said Padilla joined the band recently, replacing fiddler Lissa Schenkenburger, and praised her facility with "the traditions of old-time and bluegrass fiddle music."

As for the collaboration with Flinner, Simmons said that the group has known about his talent for years. Before being recognized as among the top mandolinists on the scene, "he was a banjo prodigy who played bluegrass festivals before he entered his teens," she said, winning the National Banjo Competition in 1990 and the mandolin award there the following year.

"It was a natural fit to involve Matt in our Solstice show," she said.

With Flinner along for the ride, "prepare for some virtuosic foot-stomping bluegrass and old-time instrumental numbers, heartbreakingly stunning vocal harmonies, a Jethro Tull cover, a classic Christmas drinking song, and more," Simmons said.

Which, we may assume, includes light. And joy.

*Low Lily with special guest Matt Flinner present "Winter Solstice Mini-Fest" at the Katharine Hepburn Cultural Arts Center, 300 Main St. Old Saybrook, Friday, Dec. 17 at 8 pm. For tickets and information, visit [thekate.org](http://thekate.org) or call 877-503-1286.*

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