

The Meadows Brothers do their own twang

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OLD SAYBROOK » Last winter, Ian and Dustin Meadows of Chester's The Meadows Brothers were playing at a tiny pub in Ohio. It was a slow night. Two elderly men had been parked at the bar since they'd started.

"Every time we finished a song, they'd shout out, 'play it right, boys,' 'play it right,'" recalled Dustin in a phone interview.

He, along with older brother Ian, will be playing their self-described brand of "homegrown countrified folked-up soulful American rocknroll roots music" on Wednesday, July 22, on the Old Saybrook Green as part of the town's summer concert series.

The song that was born from that night, told from the perspective of one of the barflies, raises the question repeatedly put to them.

How, considering that Ian and Dustin are 21 and 19, respectively; considering they were born and bred in the Rockwellian town of Chester, could either know anything about the world-weary yearning on the part of those men to "play it right," because, as the lyrics read, "the music can't quite heal you, but it gets pretty close"?

"It wouldn't be too interesting if we wrote about ourselves," said Dustin, who waits tables at the Cuckoo's Nest in Old Saybrook; Ian works at AcousticMusic.org, a high-end guitar store in Guilford. "So we try to put ourselves into other people's shoes."

Evidently, that approach has resonated. Last year, they were recipients of the 2014 Rising Artist Detection and Recognition Award (RADAR) as one of the fastest rising acts in New England, affording them the opportunity to put their talents on display at the New England Music Awards.

There, according to music critic Marlon Pitter, the "acoustic guitar-playing duo" with "their distinct mix of Americana and folk music ... displayed majestic vocal harmonies to accompany their instruments."

Not long after that, they got word that The Midnight Union Band from Kilkenny, Ireland had covered "A Train Makes a Sad Sad Sound," a train-song-genre contribution with interlocking vocal phrases that showcases the pair's precocious ability to wring sophistication out of an established song form.

And this May, they were named Best Act in Connecticut at the New England Music Awards, with *Howl Magazine* extolling their ability to "kick up more dust than a southbound train."

Arguably, it's no surprise that, as the Boston Globe



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JUDY HONER

Ian and Dustin Meadows got an early start on their musical careers.

put it, "Ian and Dustin Meadows prove that roots music is an unending resource, turning early influences gleaned from The Band and Gillian Welch into an engagingly twangy sibling sound all their own."

After all, the Meadows Brothers have been playing music together for most of their lives. While still in elementary school, Ian asked his parents for an electric guitar. They said no. He bought one for himself and taught himself how to play. By the time Dustin was in sixth grade — he had already picked up the guitar, drums, and harmonica — the two had formed a classic rock band

with some of their school friends.

"Our musical instincts are very similar because we've gone through our musical phases together," said Dustin, who credited the Natters of Face Arts Music in Deep River for developing and honing their skills.

Along the way, they discovered the Americana majesty of The Band, as well as songwriter-singer Welch and her guitarist husband David Rawlings with their singular stew of rural Appalachian sound, folk, and country.

"We were blown away," Dustin said. "The simplicity of the songs, how much emotion they got across in



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The Meadows Brothers' new album was released in June.

a stripped-down setting, the full sound they made with just two voices. It was a turning point."

Their new album, "Won't Be Troubled," at once draws on that influence while integrating foot-stomping backwoods blues, hard-driving honky-tonk, and gut-bucket, dirt-road old-time music into the mix.

It's their first album since they were both in high school. "We really wanted to play this batch of songs a lot because it takes time for songs to take shape and become part of a band's identity," Dustin said.

That kind of measured restraint is uncommon in a business where fierce ambition is the norm. It's also in harmony with The Meadows Brothers' modest aspirations.

"We want to be able to play music to make a living," said Dustin. "We're not in this to become rich or famous. We just want to make people happy with the songs we write."

If that means "playing it right" for those men at the Ohio bar, "bring it on," he said.

The Meadows Brothers will appear at 7 p.m. July 22 on the town green on Main Street. For more information, call 860-395-3152. For more information on the Meadows Brothers, visit themeadowsbrothers.bandcamp.com.