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FEATURED

Preteen siblings to strum and sing at Lotus

By Connie Shakalis Special to the H-T Sep 24, 2017



Giri and Uma Peters (brother/sister bluegrass duo). Courtesy photo

Sibling rivalry in this family is less about the last piece of cake than about who played the E-natural instead of a flat.

Giri and Uma Peters, Indian-American brother and sister, will be performing at Bloomington's Lotus Festival this month. Equipped with clawhammer banjo, mandolin and fiddle, they will sing and play in the old-time and roots-music styles.

Roots music refers to several types of songs, including traditional country, gospel, zydeco (black American dance music from Louisiana) and Native American pow-wow. Like a family history wrapped in music, it tells

ordinary men's and women's stories and passes them along the generations.

The talented duo essentially came into being one day several years ago when then-5-year-old brother, Giri (like "Gary" but rhymes with cheery), heard violist Christopher Farrell. Farrell, who has a master's in music degree from Indiana University, had played in a symphony concert Giri attended. "I saw Mr. Chris, and I have to play," he told his mother, Sarika ("Sar") Peters. He was transfixed, and he was serious. He started with Suzuki (method) violin, an internationally recognized teaching approach, then switched to mandolin and fiddle, which he has played ever since.

"The fiddle is more fun, but the mandolin comes more naturally to me," the now 12-year-old musician-singer said in a phone interview.

But where there was an older brother having fun and getting applause, there was a younger sister watching and thinking. Uma is two years his junior and beginning at age 5 had been forming plans of her own. Two of her idols, singer, violinist and banjo player Rhiannon Giddens, and singer and clawhammer banjo player Abigail Washburn, had long been Uma's inspiration, and now — observing her brother — Uma was itching to strum and sing in public.

Uma, too, started with the Suzuki violin and plays the fiddle, but she chose clawhammer banjo as her second instrument. This is an open-back banjo and is not usually played with a pick but with thumb and fingernail to create the three-beat "claw-ham-mer" rhythms.

Giri and Uma live in Nashville, Tennessee, and have already enjoyed playing some hefty venues in the southeastern U.S. One recent success was being featured as the musical interludes for a daylong series of health-focused Ted Talks at Nashville's Schermerhorn Symphony Center.

For the Lotus Festival the siblings are looking forward to giving three performances. "I'm really excited about seeing different instruments and hearing music from different parts of the world," Giri said in a phone interview, sounding composed (and adorable).

One can only hope he doesn't repeat his worst-to-date musical experience — the time he dropped his bow, which of course somersaulted down a flight of stairs and cracked.

One big draw for them about Lotus is that they will meet other performers.

These siblings are not lonely musicians who want to commune with their bows and strings and tuning forks.

“Giri had always been fascinated by musical instruments,” Peters said, “and then he started wanting to play music with others.”

Peters, who played piano and flute in her youth, gives most of the credit to her dedicated offspring, however. She veered away from performing and is a pediatric psychologist at Vanderbilt University. But she hasn’t veered away from driving the twosome to rehearsals and gigs. They practice (almost) daily, with occasional prodding, she said.

In addition to their scheduled performances at Lotus, Giri and Uma will be on WFHB radio around 1 p.m. Saturday.



The Cuckoo
Sep 23, 2017

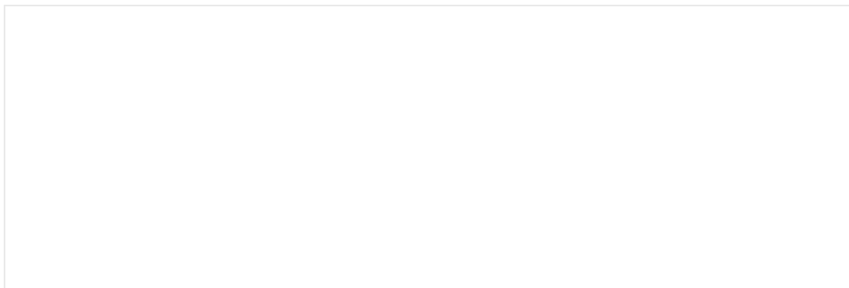
If you go

WHO: Giri & Uma Peters

WHEN: 6:30-7:15 p.m. and 7:45-8:30 p.m. Friday; 6:15-7:15 p.m. Saturday.

WHERE: First Christian Church, 205 E. Kirkwood Ave.

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