

Rising Appalachia rising to Cascades for Sisters Folk Festival

By Ceili Cornelius
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Sister duo Leah and Chloe Smith make up Rising Appalachia. Rising Appalachia and their five-piece band will be featured at the 2019 Sisters Folk Festival.

As world travelers for over two decades, their sound blends various musical styles from around the world, rooted in Americana. Leah Smith spoke with *The Nugget* on the creation of the band and origin of their sound.

The two sisters did not mean to create a band when they started playing music together. The two grew up in a musical household with music always playing, and it being a hobby for their parents. As a gift for their father they decided to do an art/music combined project documenting the musical influences they had in their life.

“We made the tape for our father as a fun project and never thought of music as a career choice,” said Smith.

The sisters then began to play the songs they had put together around their local community in Georgia. Festival organizers saw them perform and were intrigued. They then sold all of the CD tapes they had made.

“We thought we would have those CD tapes until we were 90, but people bought them at these small shows and so after hundreds of other small crossroads, we became a

band,” she said.

Their idea and band was not by design and they wanted to create something that had musicality and lyrics that mattered at the core. Smith described their music as “world folk soul.”

“We don’t really fit into a specific genre, and folk has such a specific sound, but we branch off of that sound with influences from around the world,” she said.

In their band, they have an Irish fiddle player, West African traditional hunters harp player, as well as bodhran and banjo players in addition to the traditional bluegrass guitar.

“Our sound is very much based in the roots of Southern music done in the broadest way,” said Smith.

The name for the band came about from branching out of the traditional Southern roots sound. The name came to Leah in a dream: Rising Appalachia, stemming from the fact that they are from an area near the Appalachians and influenced heavily by the traditional Appalachian mountain sound. But they are “rising” out of that traditional sound and putting their own influences and spin on it.

One of Smith’s favorite parts about playing with her sister is the connection they have on stage not only with their harmonies, but with their overall presence.

“It is really great that if one of us is not at the top of our



PHOTO PROVIDED

Leah and Chloe Smith – Rising Appalachia – will bring their eclectic roots-based music to Sisters in the Sisters Folk Festival, September 6-8.

game, the other can help out and take over,” she said.

The two are also able to distribute the workload easier being family and able to ask one another for help.

“It really helps with the burnout when the other person can take over some of the work or tougher aspects of being touring musicians,” said Smith.

Leah spent six years in Latin America and her sister spent many years abroad in Europe and across the world. They’ve spent most of their lives traveling and on the

road, leaving their family home at 18.

“We learned at a young age how broad the United States borders are and how many people don’t leave or are single language speakers,” she said.

The impact of traveling for so many years and to many different places had a huge influence on their songwriting and musical style.

“In our music, we have this melting pot of influences in a really natural way, showing a real extension of our life experience and being able to

be immersed in these cultures and be true to our creativity,” she said.

Their latest record, “Leylines,” is a collection with Southern rock influence combined with their world musical influences. They wanted the record to be a showcase of all those of elements, using their own original lyricism.

“As folk musicians primarily, in our lyrics a lot of it is about what is happening in the world which is true folk music,” she said.

The band has played Oregon a number of times, including at Oregon Country Fair and music festivals in Portland. This will be their first time in Sisters.

“It will be fun for us sisters to be playing in Sisters. And we’ve heard great things about the Sisters Folk Festival and are looking forward to it,” said Smith.

Rising Appalachia will be playing the Sisters Folk Festival in Friday-evening and Saturday-evening performances. For tickets and schedule information visit www.sistersfolkfestival.org.

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