

The Register-Guard

ENTERTAINMENT HOME

MUSIC

Brothers Comatose's house music comes from their folks

The Easy Leaves open the Friday, Feb. 26, show at Sam Bond's





The Brothers Comatose (Rosie Gutierrez)

BY JOANNA BARTLETT

For The Register-Guard

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Ben and Alex Morrison, the guitar- and banjo-playing brothers in the Brothers Comatose, grew up in a house infused with folk music.

“Our mom was in a folk quartet in the ‘80s,” Ben Morrison says. “Alex and I grew up watching them rehearse and play. It was two acoustic guitars and four-part harmonies.”

VIDEO

Brothers Comatose - "Brothers" (Official Video)



On Sundays, when no one had gigs, they would host music parties with people playing and singing folk songs all day long.

“When you’re kids, that stuff is like magic,” he says.

The spell was cast. Ben learned to play his dad’s acoustic guitar. And when someone left a banjo behind after a party, Alex picked it up and learned to play it.

“We almost found the music through the instruments,” Ben says. “We’ve got a banjo and an acoustic guitar; what do we do with them?”

"We sought out music that used those instruments."

Even when he was a teen, rebelling against the soft strains of folk music and playing in rock bands, Ben still was drawn to his folk upbringings.

"Even when I was in that heavy rock band, I'd work on songs on acoustic guitar," he says. Eventually, "We gravitated back toward acoustic instruments. We dug deeper and deeper and came across what we have now."

What they have now is an upbeat, broad-stroke Americana string band.

"We started playing around 2007," Morrison says. "It started with my brother and I, and then a friend of ours, playing crappy bars around San Francisco for free beer, or open mike nights, whenever we could."

"Little by little, we started getting awesome musician friends to join in."

The city by the bay

Those friends include Gio Benedetti on bass, Phillip Brezina on fiddle and Ryan Avellone on mandolin. Together, they create bright, self-reflective acoustic music.

"We don't take ourselves too seriously," Ben says. "Were kind of goofy dudes. The music reflects that."

"We write what we know."

The Brothers' first album, 2010's "Songs From the Stoop," was, he says, "about living in San Francisco on Haight Street, sitting on our front porch, writing songs, being young and dumb."

"Respect the Van," their second album, released in 2012, reflected their new lives touring and playing music, "being away from home, away from girlfriends and wives, family and friends," Ben says.

The Brothers Comatose releases their latest effort, "City Painted Gold," on March 4.

"This most recent album is about the end of our time in San Francisco," Morrison says. "There's a lot of money moving in and tech companies taking over, and the weirdos and artists moving out because they can't afford high rent prices."

During the course of recording the album, the band was evicted from its house on Haight Street in San Francisco's historically counterculture Haight-Ashbury district, which spawned the Grateful Dead, among others.

"New landlords bought the building, and they wanted to live there, so we got booted out," he says. "We'd been comfortable there, but it's good to try different things. It was the closing of a chapter."

They resettled in nearby Oakland.

New album on sale at show

The album was funded by a wildly successful Kickstarter campaign.

"We had no idea we'd get the kind of support that we did. Our fans are awesome," Ben says. "We were blown away."

"City Painted Gold" will be available at the Brothers' show Friday at Sam Bond's Garage, one stop on a monthlong tour traveling up the West Coast and into the Midwest.

And while they're not quite the same as the daylong musical parties their parents hosted when they were kids, "The shows are definitely a party," Bensays. "We have a good time. We're not just a listening band — we like to inspire the crowd to get involved: to

clap and dance and shout out.

"We fall into the rowdy roots category."

Joanna Bartlett is a Eugene freelance writer who's been active for more than 15 years. She can be reached at joanna.y.bartlett@gmail.com.

CONCERT PREVIEW

The Brothers Comatose

Opener: The Easy Leaves

When: 8:30 p.m. Friday, Feb. 26

Where: Sam Bond's Garage, 407 Blair Blvd.

Tickets: \$10 (www.sambonds.com)

Learn more and listen: www.thebrotherscomatose.com

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