

Husband and wife to play sweet music here

By Christina Beringer

Colby Free Press
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New to Colby's annual Pickin' on the Plains festival is a young husband and wife duo who are quickly rising in the bluegrass and gospel arena.

Darin and Brooke Aldridge, from North

Carolina, are known as the "Sweethearts of Bluegrass." Their style is a mix of secular and gospel material that range from country duets to toe-tapping up-tempo pieces.

Their first album, "I'll Go With You," brought national attention to the couple. It reached number five on the top 10 bluegrass albums on the bluegrass and roots music charts and also topped the Sirius-XM playlist

in August of last year.

The second and most recent album from the Aldridge couple is self-titled and expected for release by early August. It showcases songs about their faith in God and love for one another.

"We promise that there won't be any killing, cheating or cussing in any of the songs," Darin joked. "We prefer to live on the sunny side of the street and sing songs about love and our faith."

The three featured artists on the new album from Mountain Home Label by Crossroads Music include country music legend and hall of fame member Tom T. Hall and his wife Dixie.

The Halls join the Aldridges in a song written by Hall that will "bring a smile to your face as you listen and allow yourself to think about your own little world," Brooke said.

Darin has gravitated to music since he was six years old when he began playing the piano and drums. He learned how to play the banjo when he joined his first band, Straight and Narrow, and then moved to the mandolin.

He has also performed jazz and folk rock with Acoustic Syndicate on the east coast, Blue Highway, Mike Snider, Blueridge and with County Gentlemen for seven years until 2004. Darin was involved with three of the Country Gentlemen's top albums, including

Crying in the Chapel, which received a nomination for gospel event of the year from the International Bluegrass Music Association; and Songs of the American Spirit, which won best bluegrass album of the year in 2005 from the Society for the Preservation of Bluegrass Music of America.

Darin's personal repertoire includes a solo album, "Call It A Day," and four nominations for mandolin player of the year. He teaches music at Gaston County School of the Arts in Gastonia, N.C.

Brooke also shares with students as a preschool teacher. She earned a degree from Appalachian State University in Boone, N.C., in early childhood education.

She began singing in and winning contests as a teenager and competed in the Nashville Star regional competition in 2004 where she finished third out of more than a hundred.

Her first solo album was recorded with Pinecastle Records in 2007. It showcases her vocal talent with words of faith and personal commitment.

Touring with the couple are Rachel Renee Johnson from Bristol, Tenn., who plays fiddle and guitar; banjo player, Chris Bryant, from Wilkes County, N.C.; and Dwayne Anderson, the group's upright bassist who is currently attending East Tennessee State University.

Showing off the goods



ANDY HEINTZ/Colby Free Press

Pickin' on the Plains draws some colorful characters from all around the country, such as this concert-goer, who showed off his custom-carved instrument at the jam session before the 2010 show.

New Kansas youth band to make festival debut

By Tomi Miller

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The Treblemakers, a youth band sponsored by the non-profit Kansas Bluegrass Association, will be making its first appearance on the Pickin' on the Plains stage at 6:45 p.m. Friday and again at 2:50 p.m. Saturday.

The band members are just taking off in their careers. The group of youngsters became a band in April of 2010 when the association's board of directors decided to get the youth more involved with bluegrass. However, don't let their short amount of stage experience fool you. The group is an up and coming band that has made a lot of progress in a short amount of time.

After the association held auditions, it appointed Bill and Beverly Hammers to make the final selection. After the auditions were over and the group was set, many hours of practice began.

After a few months, the Hammers realized the group needed more experienced instruction. To keep growing, they needed to be guided by a teacher who was more than familiar with bluegrass music. Mark Johnson, an El Dorado banjo player for the former Bennett Brothers band, was selected for the task. Johnson started coaching the group in October.

"The kids are doing great!" Johnson said. "They are so dedicated; they want to learn."

The Treblemakers meet at least once a week for a minimum of three hours' practice. During this time, the group learns new song arrangements and vocal harmony structure. Not only do they work on the musical aspect of bluegrass, but they are also taught stage presence and other factors that will make them a successful band. This instruction is in addition to weekly private lessons each band member receives from their individual instrument teachers.

"They do anything I tell them," Johnson said. "They are always to practice on time and we recently put in a seven-hour practice."

The band members include 13-year-old Ashton Burel, fiddle player from Derby; 12-year-old Dawson Tarrant, guitar player from Conway Springs; 20-year-old Ben Guiltner, mandolin and fiddle player from Clearwater; and 20-year-old Nick Johnson, banjo player from Cassoday. Every member of the band sings both lead and harmony vocals. Johnson also plays bass and sings.

The enthusiasm and talent of the band continues to win fans over. The group has recently had the opportunity to play at the Wichita River Festival on the main stage. They have even opened for Driven, who are also playing at Pickin' on the Plains, and the Grascals, a national act.

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