

Between the trees and the skies, music

Alan Bennett

Originally published Feb. 16, 2015

What makes a band?

For some, it's big shows with flashing lights, crazy hair and screaming fans. For others, it's pounding drums and screeching guitars.

But for local Maine band GoldenOak, it's just about the music.

Comprised of brother and sister Zach and Lena Kendall and their friends Seth Wegner, Peter Coleman and Julian Stearns, GoldenOak is just one of many bands featuring University of Maine students, and is a contender in Maine's up-and-coming folk scene.

You might have seen them on one of their many stops across the state. They have traveled to Bar Harbor and Rockland, among others, but still see Farmington, Maine as their home base. With the exception of Stearns — who is from New Jersey — Farmington is where the group grew up, attended Mt. Blue High School and shared their love of both music and nature, a love they share to this day.

“That's how it kind of all started out, just friends around a fire playing music,” Lena Kendall, who sings and plays assorted percussion in the band, said.

“Seth would bring his cello out, or Zach would have his guitar always, or someone would be like beating a drum on a rock and so it just kind of transgressed from that into more of a band,” she said.

Those literal grassroots are both heard in their music and reflected in their name.

“The naming process has been, well, a process,” Lena Kendall said, explaining how at one point her brother, Zach and Wegner were in their own band named “Walking with Horses” prior to forming GoldenOak.

“I joined the band and I was like, ‘I'm not going to be in a band called Walking with Horses,’” she said.

“We knew we wanted it to be something that kind of revolved around nature or kind of brought up the image of something to do with nature,” Lena Kendall said. “A lot of our songs really portray that connection between humans and nature.”

And so, GoldenOak was born.

More admirable than their connection to nature are their connections to each other. While Lena Kendall and Coleman attend UMaine, Stearns attends Eastern Maine Community College in Bangor, and Wegner and Zach Kendall attend College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor. But they don't let the distance come between them.

"Two of us will travel to the Bangor, Orono area or three of us will travel to the Bar Harbor area and we'll make a weekend out of it where we play music and go to Acadia," Lena Kendall said. "It's just really fun."

When it comes to challenges in the pursuit of music, the distance is nothing. Instead, it's getting the word out about their work.

GoldenOak has yet to put out a formal EP, which would greatly boost their chances of being heard. Although the group has made recordings in the past, they weren't ready to market themselves with lackluster material.

"We didn't want to put something out there that didn't sound professional," Lena Kendall said, describing how the majority of their recordings sounded a little too "garage band" than they would like to market.

Lena Kendall explained the group will begin recording their material professionally at the end of February. They have 10 original songs completed and about five more nearly done, she said.

"I think all of us are looking forward to that process and having something tangible to show for ourselves," Coleman, who plays electric guitar, said.

For the band, recording their EP marks the next step toward their future.

"I always said that college was my 'Plan B,' and I'm just doing that first to have something to fall back on. But music is the 'Plan A,'" Lena Kendall, who is an elementary education student, said.

"I do love teaching," she said, "But if the opportunity were to ever arise of something big happening with the music, I couldn't stop myself from doing that. It's just what makes me the happiest."