

Defying Genres: The Intimate Compositions of Scroggins & Rose

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by Kara Martinez Bachman

Take a listen to Scroggins & Rose, and you'll feel sure you've never heard anything else like it. Difficult to slot into the "normal" genre classifications, the music of this duo is a unique mix that knows no stringent rules and respects no hard boundaries. At times it lilts, at times it soars, at times it runs with frenetic plucks. It's a kind of string music with personality; it fits in no tidy boxes. At times, it resembles chamber music. At others, traditional bluegrass played on somebody's front porch. Wherever it lands, however, one thing's for sure: The musicianship of Scroggins & Rose can't be denied.

<https://youtu.be/svyi98ZELi0>

Although their website attempts a description, promising a "convergence of bluegrass and classical genres" – one listen will prove that's simply an approximation.

"The music is kind of this weird combination of what the two of us enjoy," said mandolin player Tristan Scroggins, of his collaborations with Grammy Award-nominated violinist, Alisa Rose. "The uniqueness of it is that it's not trying to recreate anything. In the end-product, you can hear bluegrass...classical...funk...jazz..."

Scroggins – who lives in Nashville, Tenn. – met the Oakland, Calif.-based Rose when they both taught at a camp, and the two musicians “realized we had a lot of similar influences. That made it easier to make a musical connection,” Scroggins said.

Scroggins’ extensive experience comes from touring with the bluegrass band of his father, two-time national banjo champion, Jeff Scroggins.

He has been recognized with the IBMA Momentum Award for Instrumentalist of the Year, a third-place award in the Mike Auldridge Instrumental Composition Competition, and in 2016, he was named a finalist for Song of the Year of the International Acoustic Music Awards. He’s Performed onstage at the Grand Ole Opry with Molly Tuttle and Opry at the Ryman with Dailey & Vincent.



Cover Design by Grace Van't Hof

He said he first became interested in music when playing his father's banjo. He tried, but it just didn't work out.



photo by Lenny Gonzalez

"I started playing the mandolin because it's easier than the banjo," Scroggins confessed. "I tried to learn the banjo, but I didn't understand it." His father gave him an old mandolin that had been handed down through generations of family; it would soon become the new favorite.



photo by Lenny Gonzalez

Rose – who studied classical chamber music – performs with a variety of ensembles, including the Grammy-nominated Quartet San Francisco. She’s performed in some of the world’s renowned venues including Carnegie Hall and teaches at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

While Scroggins and Rose do perform live, the nature of the music does not lend itself well to many of the normal venues frequented by touring acts. Bars and nightclubs, for instance, just don’t work with what they’re doing. This is a kind of music that needs to be listened to actively and can’t be appreciated in noisy environments or at large festivals where “plugging in” is a requirement of being heard.

“Most of what we do is house concerts, where we can create an intimate vibe,” Scroggins explained. “It’s written to be performed acoustically.”

The duo’s new record, “Curios,” just released in June. Scroggins said this one is a bit different from their first, 2017’s “Grana.”

“Our first record was based more on the improvisation that we were into, but for this record, we spent a lot of time being deliberate,” he explained, saying “Curios” is also compositionally-driven toward being more “emotionally complex.”

“We’re really proud of how it came out,” Scroggins said.

In their efforts to bridge the gap between classical and folk music, by all appearances, this young duo are fulfilling their goal of “breathing new life into old traditions.”