

# Joy: the Goal Igniting Prairie Wildfire

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by Kara Martinez Bachman

As the saying goes, “you gotta start somewhere.” When it comes to Prairie Wildfire, they’ve started out somewhere pretty darn good.

These four young gals with a penchant for folk, country, and bluegrass met when they were just kids at a bluegrass camp in their hometown of Buffalo, Wyoming. That was five years ago. Today, they’re making a name for themselves locally and even regionally, with regular gigs and a growing following of people who have now heard their name. This group makes it clear that there are still young people who love old things. When it comes to bluegrass, these young ladies are embracing the “old” and loving every bit of it.

They’ve been jammin’ as Prairie Wildfire for about five years now, and their main stomping grounds is the historic Occidental Hotel there in Buffalo.

Upright bass player Morgan Blaney loves the venue that embraces her favorite genre.

*“It’s a community of people who love music, whether they like to play or like to listen,” Blaney said. “The building itself is absolutely beautiful, it was built in the mid-to-late 1800s.”*





The girls have gigged in Colorado, Montana, Nebraska, and other nearby states, and they've already had some cool experiences because of their passion for music.

"We've met so many great musicians," Blaney said. "We actually met Dale Ann Bradley and got to perform a few songs with her. That was amazing. The thing that we love about bluegrass is being able to play with other people, regardless of what level you're at."

She said it's exactly that sense of respect for all musicians, of any age or level – and a pervasive humility – that draws her to this style of music.

*“The main reason I love bluegrass music is people don’t really get a big head when they’re successful in bluegrass,” she explained.*

Blaney –a music major at the University of Northern Colorado – started as a child learning classical piano. She said she was “alright at it,” but it didn’t grab her the way the upright bass captured her when she started with the instrument at about age 10 or 11.

“Different instruments click with different people,” Blaney said. “I picked it up and just liked how it felt for me. I picked one up and it clicked.”

Three of the members of Prairie Wildfire met at a bluegrass music camp. The lineup for years included Blaney, plus guitarist Holly Qualm and mandolin player Sage Palser. The roster was expanded when banjo player Tessa Taylor was just recently added to the lineup.

Blaney said just as it is with most performers, some of their previously scheduled gigs have been canceled due to the Coronavirus pandemic. They’re keeping busy, though, close to home.

*“We were extremely lucky in that we have the Occidental, and I get to play there four times a week,” she said.*

Unlike many musicians, the girls aren’t spending time isolated in the studio. Although Prairie Wildfire has recorded music before, including an album that offered some classics plus six originals they’d written, another recording isn’t on the table at this time.

<https://youtu.be/L3ZvfbkmQcE>

*“Recording is a big commitment, and it’s become more and more expensive,” Blaney said. “We’re mostly focused on playing live.”*

A few of the band members are also more focused on college studies than on growing the band. The goal here, according to Blaney, isn’t necessarily to become a household name or even to have a full-time career in the music business. The goal is simpler, and perhaps much more satisfying.

“We just got into it for the joy of playing together,” Blaney admitted.

And that says it all.

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