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by Susan Marquez

A trio of singing sirens from Traverse City, Michigan are making quite a splash with their new album, released May 15. The Sweet Water Warblers' newest release, *The Dreams That Hold This Child*, is their first full studio LP. May Erlewine, Lindsay Lou, and Rachael Davis all had successful solo careers within the Americana and roots worlds, with individual perspectives on traditional music. But when a promoter suggested they play together on stage at Michigan's Hoxeyville Music Festival, the deep woods of the Manistee National Forest was filled with amazing, organic three-part vocal harmonies.

"The promoter said it would make him so happy if we'd play together," says May. We had 45 minutes to prepare, and once we were on stage, it was so easy. We named ourselves The Sweet Water Warblers for that set, and it was just really natural and fun."



The trio decided to see where their musical collaboration might take them, and they embarked on their first tour in November 2015 after only two days of rehearsal. They did another tour in February for Valentine's weekend.

"We sent song lists and work tapes to each other, we each brought all of our songs to the group," says Rachael. Lindsay says that their voices naturally lend themselves to certain registers.

May chimes in, adding that the spectrum of where each of their voices land is very intuitive. "We are all harmony singers, so we tend to have a sibling sound without being siblings."

Theirs is a unique connection, with all of the members of Sweet Water Warblers having a mutual connection for social change and an expansion of the soul through music. "Music can speak to the soul in a way nothing else can," says Lindsay.

The women are all multi-instrumentalists with a repertoire that spans from gospel and bluegrass to soul and joyful interpretations of pop. Their first EP, *With You*, was released in 2017.

May hails from Traverse City. She is a prolific and passionate songwriter. Her music has been featured in *Rolling Stone* and *Prairie Home Companion*. Her songs have made their way into everything from church choirs to living rooms around the country. Her musical leanings are Appalachian folk and country-leaning ballads.

Lindsay is a Nashville native, with country soul and bluegrass roots. She is the lead vocalist and songwriter for her band, The Flatbellies, popular at festivals worldwide, including the Telluride Bluegrass Festival, Celtic Connections in Scotland, and Woodford Folk Festival in Australia. In 2015, she was nominated as one of NPR's best live sessions

from her performance on Mountain Stage, and in 2016 she was named the IBMA's Best Vocalist. Bands like Greensky Bluegrass, Billy Strings, Yonder Mountain String Band, Leftover Salmon, and California Honeydrops feature Lou as a regular guest on stage.

Rachael was raised in a rich musical environment, and since she was a small child, she has concluded the Sunday morning gospel hour at the Wheatland Folk Festival in Remus, Michigan. She moved to Boston at age 21 to pursue her musical career, and only seven months later, she was presented with the Boston Music Award for Best New Singer-Songwriter for her soul-laced lyrics and melodies.



The Sweet Water Warblers' new album contains all original songs, with each written by members of the group, along with Maya De Vitry, who provides vocals and acoustic guitar for several selections on the LP.

When they're not touring, May, Lindsay, and Rachael have more domestic pursuits. "When we travel, it's usually for a long weekend, and even then it's hard to leave the kids," says May. The group traveled to the United Kingdom for two weeks last year. "That's the longest time we've been out," says Rachael, who took her ten-year-old son along on the trip. Their femininity defines them, although the struggles of womanhood

are not dismissed. The focus of *The Dreams That Hold This Child* is of modern femininity, with themes of creating beauty from pain. The album was produced by Dan Knobler (Lake Street Dive, Caroline Spence). The group wanted to create a project that would serve to “empower and uplift spirits, offer refuge, solidarity, and support through its focus on modern femininity,” says Lindsay. “Our sound is a place of refuge, and its roots are deep, with arms stretched wide open.” It’s important not to mistake the album’s nurturing tenderness for weakness.

“These songs are bloomed from the deep darkness of the earth and were sung awake through relentless storms,” May says. “We are here, very much, on purpose.”