

IDAHO MOUNTAIN Express AND GUIDE

Moira Smiley + VOCO Music that mourns and dances at the same time

by JENNIFER LIEBRUM

Moira Smiley's original work "Stand in That River" is a staple among ensemble musicians around the world, and that's just as she intended things when she chose the unusual musical genre that travels with—and without—her.

It's a blend of Appalachian and Eastern European traditions, performed mostly *a cappella* and with a whole lot of stomping, clapping and harmonizing with Inga Swearingen and cellist April Guthrie. It's what she will be doing Friday, Nov. 11, at 6:30 p.m. at the Sun Valley Opera House.

Moira Smiley + Voco is being brought here by the Sun Valley Center of the Arts. While they're here, they will hold two days of workshops with Wood River High School students and two assembly performances at local elementary. Smiley answered a few questions about her style to provide insight into what we can expect:

Q) When choosing how to use your instrument, how does one find their way to a seemingly obscure combination like Appalachian and Eastern European influences?

A) When I was about 10 and was a classical pianist, I was exposed to Russian, Bulgarian and Croatian music through some teachers. I always felt like this music brought me to people—it was less lonely celebrating it with people.

Half of singing is listening. Both the Appalachian and Eastern European styles are about harmony and community singing. They have really different ways of sounding, so I like getting into the emotional coat of each one. Eastern European music is passionate and extroverted. Appalachian music has the way of singing about something really dark and sad or even celebratory all with the tone of a narrator or observer. The real sharing between these folk styles is that songs are made to be sung by many people, not just listened to—they are to be shared.

I've always worked with *a cappella* music, and my music is performed by ensembles around the world because choral music is about coming together and doing something. That's now an exciting, rare thing. We're mostly watchers these days—we mostly watch others do music, or perhaps we do it all alone.

Q) Who are your cohorts on stage?

A) I'm really excited about these ladies. They both have their own solo careers as well. Inga is frequently on *Prairie Home Companion* doing "farm jazz" that is rooted in the land. And April is an experimental cellist. She plays orchestrally and explores the broader role of the cello. She also has deep roots in the Ozarks and Croatia.

Q) What will you be teaching the local kids?

A) We're working on two songs, an original arrangement of "Bring Me Little Water Sylvie" by Lead Belly, and we've added a body percussion sequence—step rhythms, stomps, claps, brushes. A little dance sequence creates the backdrop. And we'll be doing my song "Stand in That River."

Q) What's the best part about sharing the storytelling you do?

A) We were just in Eastern Washington, with kids from various cultures, speaking different languages. It's always inspiring to see how they hold on to the music from their culture. It's really amazing to see them realize that music is useful - that you can take it with you, just inside your head.

Music has a whole other way of holding memories than words themselves.



Inga Swearingen, Moira Smiley and April Guthrie (from left) blend their vocals for an appearance at the Sun Valley Opera House on Friday, Nov. 11, in an appearance touted as filled with 'joyous, magnificent and hair-raising harmonies.' Courtesy photo