

The girls of Bluegrass



— Photo by Sam Baardman

Oh My Darling: (right to left) Marie-Josée Dandeneau, Vaness Kuzina, Rosalynn Denett and Allison De Groot

□ Winnipeg quartet featured at Northern Lights Bluegrass and Old Time Music Festival

By Cam Fuller
SP Arts & Life Editor

Their new album is called *In the Lonesome Hours*, but you suspect that Oh My Darling just ain't that lonely.

The Winnipeg bluegrass band has plenty of friends, and more to come as its touring territory expands. A success right out of the gate, the four-piece of Vanessa Kuzina, Marie-Josée Dandeneau, Allison de Groot and Rosalynn Dennett scored a Western Canadian Music Award nomination with the very first thing it recorded, and it was only an EP.

"We called it the little EP that could. We really loved that EP," says Kuzina.

The band nailed its signature sound early — the combination of De Groot's Appalachian-style clawhammer banjo mixing

with Dennett's fiddle, Kuzina's vocals and Dandeneau's acoustic bass. Now they're busy just making it better, incorporating more group vocals and little adornments like hand-claps. Even though the band's debut full-length album only came out in spring, they're already looking ahead to recording again this winter.

"We've developed so much in our sound we can't wait to record our next album."

In the meantime, fans will just have to settle for accomplished playing, great singing and songs that are new but sound old. It's a fail-proof formula in bluegrass circles, and it's got enough variety to attract an even wider range of listeners who keen to the sound of folkie female phenoms like the Wailin' Jennys or Nathan.

It's honest music, says Kuzina, and that's

why people are attracted.

"Maybe it has to do with people wanting to simplify their lives, and this goes hand in hand with that. This is not complicated music. We don't try to be too fancy with it. The beauty is in its simplicity."

The group's appearance at this weekend's Northern Lights Bluegrass and Old Time Music Festival is only its second in the province. They came away with a great first impression after a spring gig at Lydia's at the end of their CD release tour.

"It was actually one of our favorite gigs on the whole tour. There was a really great vibe in there. It was packed, people were dancing and we had just a super fun time."

Kuzina said she often associates cities with smells. One reminds her of cinnamon rolls.

"Saskatoon is kind of our sister city in a

lot of ways. Every city to me has an overall feeling and an overall sense. And Saskatoon smelled like clean laundry to me. Every place has its own personality and Saskatoon's is clean laundry, which is a pretty nice thing."

□ **What:** Northern Lights Bluegrass and Old Time Music Festival

□ **Where:** 20 km northeast of Big River at the Ness Creek site

□ **When:** Friday, Saturday, Sunday

□ **Who:** The Earl Brothers, Done Gone Stringband, The Willie Sons, Ryan Bolt and more

□ **Tickets:** \$70 weekend pass, \$40 day. 12 and under free

Info: www.northernlightsbluegrass.ca