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Oh My Darling (l-r): Marie-Josée Dandeneau, Vanessa Kuzina, Rosalyn Dennett and Allison de Groot.

A big night for these darlings

Local bluegrass act Oh My Darling is set to release its debut full-length album, *In the Lonesome Hours*, at the West End Cultural Centre

music preview

OH MY DARLING CD RELEASE

April 16, 8 p.m., West End Cultural Centre
w/ Ridley Bent, Scott Nolan and Taylor Ashton (Fish & Bird)

Robin Dudgeon

Local all-woman bluegrass/roots outfit Oh My Darling is finally releasing *In the Lonesome Hours*, its much-anticipated full-length debut, on April 16 at the West End Cultural Centre.

In the Lonesome Hours pairs the girls with noted local producer Lloyd Peterson (The Wailin' Jennys, James Keelaghan), and features seven original songs and two original instrumentals that were written and arranged by the band.

The Winnipeg quartet was planning on celebrating the CD release with its friends, Toronto's The Good Lovelies, but discovered a week before it went on tour that the Lovelies would be attending this weekend's Juno Awards in St. John's, Nfld. — where they're up for roots album of the year — and wouldn't be able to play the release show. Oh My Darling vocalist Vanessa Kuzina says that while the band is happy for its friends, it was panicking to find a replacement.

"We wanted to do something unique because this is such a special night for us, so we came up with the idea to invite three singer/songwriters onstage and get them to do a round robin-style performance," Kuzina says via email from the road. "We were lucky to get three great artists that we really admire: Ridley Bent, Scott Nolan and Taylor Ashton.

We're calling them 'The Good Manlies.'"

The band will no doubt savour the special night at home. Within a week of the release bash, OMD will be back on the road, playing dates throughout Western Canada before hitting the summer festival circuit hard (the band has scheduled gigs at the Brandon Folk Festival, the Dauphin Country Festival, the Blue Skies Festival in Ottawa and the Northern Lights Bluegrass and Old Thyme Festival in Big River, Sask., to name a few).

Maintaining a busy tour schedule is nothing new for Oh My Darling. The band has been constantly on the move since the release of its self-titled debut EP — which the group affectionately calls "the little EP that could" — in 2009.

"That EP really opened the door to a lot of opportunities for the band," Kuzina says. "It earned us a Western Canadian Music Award nomination and got us on the radio, it helped us fund the new album and it gave us a good start into the business side of the music industry."

Oh My Darling was founded after vocalist/banjo player Allison de Groot decided to put together an all-female old-time band. Country singer/songwriter Kuzina and funk fusion bassist Marie-Josée Dandeneau were recruited, followed by fiddle player Rosalyn Dennett. The group quickly transcended its traditional beginnings and began to incorporate different aspects of each member's musical backgrounds, including funk, country, old tyme and Appalachian influences.

"A big part of our sound comes from the diversity of our musical influences," Kuzina says. "We each feel like we come from such different backgrounds, but we can usually find some overlap. Two of us listen to Avishai Cohen, two of us listen to Bruce Molsky, two of us listen to Gillian Welch, so

there is always a bit of common ground when we spin tunes in the tour van.

"Generally every member brings their own unique ideas to the group and then we collaborate," she continues. "In the beginning, we would bring our own completed tunes and songs to the group, and now we're finding that our best work is the music that we collaborate on the most. Lately we have been having fun working out arrangements to best suit the song or tune, and as well, feature what we each bring to the group."

That high level of commitment to the craft can be seen in Oh My Darling's live show. Having toured consistently over the past two years, the quartet has grown a lot between the release of the EP and the latest album, evolving into a more cohesive unit, both onstage and off.

"We all strive to keep learning our instruments better, and that means the general level of musicianship in the band is constantly improving," Kuzina says.

And Oh My Darling won't be slowing down any time soon.

Kuzina says she and her bandmates already have their eyes on their next release.

"You can expect another recording to come out hopefully within a year from now," Kuzina says. "We've written about half of the material already, which we have begun to incorporate into our live sets. We plan to keep expanding our audience, and hopefully that will mean doing some touring internationally. We're looking forward to holing up in a cabin this summer to finish writing what will become our next release."

For more info see our *What's Up* entertainment listings, beginning on page 8.