

SongSisters blend musical styles, humor for folk club concert



SongSisters will perform May 19 in Grayslake. (SongSisters)

By **Sheryl DeVore**
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Musicians Amy Dixon-Kolar, Sue Fink and Patti Shaffner immediately liked each other when they met.

“We found out individually that we meshed as people,” said Dixon-Kolar. “We were all doing our own thing as musicians. But as we got to know each even more, we realized we liked each other’s music as well.”

That led to the creation of SongSisters, a folk trio performing upbeat, poignant and humorous music. The trio will be singing and strumming their guitars May 19 at the Lake County Folk Club.

“Sue and Patti met first and they started corresponding and realized they so much liked each other and then I met Sue at a folk alliance regional conference and we really liked each other,” Dixon-Kolar said. When Fink

was offered a gig and asked to invite a couple more musicians, she invited Dixon-Kolar and Shaffner. “And we found out we enjoyed putting harmony on each other’s music,” Dixon-Kolar said.

Though each has a solo career, they make time to rehearse and learn new tunes to perform as SongSisters. Dixon-Kolar lives in McHenry County, Fink lives in Chicago and Shaffner lives in Indiana. They meet in Chicago for rehearsals. “We’ve been together formally since 2013, but informally for years before that. We make it work. We learn to balance,” Dixon-Kolar said.

They also discovered they shared favorite songs, such as “Forever Young” by Bob Dylan. “It’s a wonderful song for the three of us to put harmonies on,” Dixon-Kolar said, adding, “We’re all women of a certain age. We enjoy celebrating that you can be a musician, you can be whatever you want to be no matter what your age.”

A new song they added to their repertoire is “Lean In Toward The Light” by Carrie Newcomer. “We just love the message,” Dixon-Kolar said.

“We really believe in giving music to the world that is uplifting, that is joyous, that has positive messages of hope, but not Pollyanish,” Dixon-Kolar said. “We’re looking at the world realistically, but instead of getting up there and singing the-world-is-falling-apart-type songs, we want to share a message of hope and joy and good fun with our audiences.”

Each has different styles and skills to bring to the group, Dixon-Kolar said. “Patti is a trained jazz musician, but she also has done many years with folk music. She’s also an actress. She brings a real jazz flair to the folk songs.

“Sue is a humorist, but she also writes these incredibly poignant songs,” Dixon-Kolar said.

“I’m more the traditional folk singer. I grew up on all the old folk music. It’s been in my life since I was born. I also do Celtic music and blues.

“We all play guitar, we all have other instruments we sometimes throw into the mix, some percussion and ukulele,” she said.

Dixon-Kolar said she thinks what endears SongSisters to the audience is the harmony. “We spend a lot of time working to develop our harmonies. We look very different and we just have very different styles and so you don’t expect the voices to blend so well,” she said.

Their goal is that the audience walks away feeling good having heard a song that touched them or made them laugh.

They often perform “Kinder,” by Copper Wimmin. “It’s a song about having a positive attitude and being kinder to yourself and being open to what the world is going to give you. We have been asked to do that song sometimes twice in a set,” Dixon-Kolar said.

They also perform their own songs. “Patti (Shaffner) has written an incredible song called ‘A Dervish Heart’ that’s jazzy,” Dixon-Kolar said.

The trio will also sing a Dixon-Kolar song, “Tell Me Now.”

“It’s a song people always enjoy. It’s about telling to people that you love them now,” Dixon-Kolar said.

They also plan to perform “Serial Bad Dater” written by Fink.

“It’s off her new CD. It’s very funny,” Dixon-Kolar said.

SongSisters has one live CD, which was recorded in 2013. The trio hopes to get back into the studio to record a new album.

Their goal is to keep growing.

“We want to keep adding new songs and new instruments and see how far we can take it because we just love doing it so much,” Dixon-Kolar said.

SongSisters

When: 7 p.m. May 19

Location: Grayslake Heritage Center, 164 Hawley St., Grayslake

Tickets: \$13-\$18

Information: 847-602-8882; thelakecountyfolkclub.org

Sheryl DeVore is a freelance reporter for the News-Sun.