



Josiah Knight and Olaf Vali Duna are a folk duo that gets people dancing.

Wild West

Outlaw Kindred

It's fair to say that danceability isn't always on an acoustic band's resume. Often with no drummer in sight, you don't see folks leave their seats to hit the floor at a folk show.

That's not how Outlaw Kindred operates, though. The Reno duo's upbeat music gets people moving, even to the point where they held their own at a recent festival that featured mostly Electronic acts.

"The way we designed this music was to be accessible to more than just your average person that likes folk music," said banjo player and singer Olaf Vali Duna. "It was designed to have good rhythm, to be easily accessible dancing music."

That's not to say that the duo are disco revivalists. Vali Duna and acoustic guitarist and singer Josiah Knight play what they describe as Western folk music, rooted in tradition but played with a modern verve. Those less by-the-book attributes of folk, bluegrass and country are what gives the band its self-proclaimed "outlaw" status.

"You have standardizations in this type of music, and we take those musical standards and adapt that to create a more unique type of music," Vali Duna said.

"I think with bluegrass you definitely have a lot more purist elements, but don't

have those limitations necessarily," Knight said. "We can do what we want."

That also means something of a surprise in left-of-center music—a strict policy of keeping the lyrics clean.

"We designed all of our music to be accessible, so there's no cussing there, no negativity," Vali Duna said. "We want Grandma to be able to listen to our music. We don't use profanity, because folk music isn't meant to be profane. It's just meant to tell a story and be honest."

Vali Duna and Knight first brought their talent and independent streaks together as teen friends growing up in Sacramento. "We've both done solo stuff for a long time, and we actually toured our solo stuff together, and then we combined our powers," Vali Duna said with a laugh.

Those powers include strong harmonies and musicianship, including Vali Duna's distinctive lead banjo playing. It includes some very speedy playing at times, and some near-hardcore-punk velocity runs that are astonishing to see live. Knight said it's a style they've both developed over time.

"I was not born playing like that," he said. "It takes a lot of time sitting with your instrument to play that fast, and it's taken us a long time to get to that point together. If we're going that fast, it's like two people that are running downhill, so you have to really concentrate."

"It's never easy to play what we are playing," Vali Duna added. "It's never like, 'Oh, we're just going through the motions.' Every time we play, we're really on the edge with the fast stuff."

The duo will be on full display sometime this spring on their first album, *The Ballad of Outlaw Kindred*. It's a concept record set in 1800s Nevada and features cowboy poet John Charleton narrating between tracks.

"It even starts with a 'giddy-up, pony,' song," Vali Duna said with a chuckle. "We have some mining songs, wild horse songs. John really gives you the feel of being in the West, of being outside in the wild and living free. I would say that's another reason why we call what we do outlaw music. It's really all about living free." □

You can hear demos from *The Ballad of Outlaw Kindred*, plus see a show calendar and more at outlawkindred.com.

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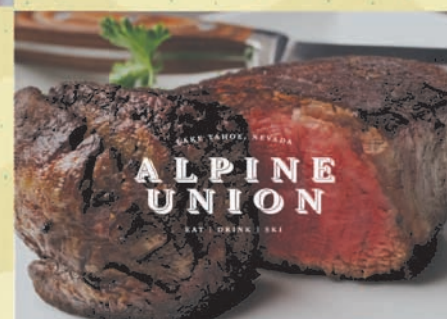
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