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By JOHN JURGENSEN

THE ARENA

Married Music

Shovels & Rope: Keeping The Band in the Family

Singer-songwriters Cary Ann Hearst and Michael Trent got married in 2009. It was only later that they wedded their musical lives.



Michael Trent and Cary Ann Hearst *Leslie Ryan McKellar*

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be heartfelt and bittersweet and also nasty with a rock 'n' roll swagger," Ms. Hearst says. On "Birmingham," a song about their own courtship, they sing, "Making something out of nothing with a scratch and a hope, two old guitars like a shovel and a rope."

The couple from Charleston, S.C., had been chipping away at respective solo careers. She issued several albums of raw country folk and got a song on HBO's "True Blood." He made clever rock records and landed a record deal that fizzled. Frustrated with their struggles to pay separate backing bands, they decided to team up and strip down. As Shovels & Rope, the duo started performing with two Gibson guitars, singing harmonies and taking turns on a mongrel drum kit.

Then the phone started ringing. For the next year they toured as an opening act for such Americana stars as Hayes Carll, Justin Townes Earle and the Felice Brothers.

This week the couple released the album "O' Be Joyful." Some songs emphasize banjo, fiddle and the raspy country vocals of Nashville-raised Ms. Hearst. On other tracks, the growl of Mr. Trent's guitar can sound more punk than honky tonk.

Toggling these styles "satisfies our need to

The couple travels in a 24-foot Winnebago. Before a gig this week in Cottage Grove, Ore., they conducted a joint phone interview from opposite ends of a bridge, as Ms. Hearst walked their Plott hound, named after the late singer-songwriter Townes Van Zandt.

The duo expects to play 200 concerts this year to build word-of-mouth and pursue "the long, slow dollar," Ms. Hearst says. With two people in the band, the money stretches farther now, and drops into "one family bank account."