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## Wild Child interview: Indie sensations give fans 'The Runaround'

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Todd Wolfson



Kevin Yeanoplos | Tucson Concerts Examiner

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In their never ending quest for academic enlightenment, resourceful college students have developed an abundance of “learning aids and techniques” over the years to assist them in their march towards valedictory attainment.

Chances are that the vast majority of the aspiring scholars have at one point or another “enrolled” in the “backseat business school,” requiring *only* that the intrepid learners get their “hands on a whole bunch of red wine and hit the books.” Hey, it worked for [Wild Child](#) founding members **Kelsey Wilson** and **Alexander Beggins**.

And while the “scholarly discussions” may not have furthered their respective *academic* careers, they *did* reveal the talented artists’ extraordinary songwriting chemistry – and result in two remarkable albums.

Beggins (ukelele/vox), Wilson (violin/vox) and the rest of the “Wild Children” – **Evan Magers** (keys), **Chris D’Annunzio** (bass), **Carey McGraw** (drums) and **Sadie Wolfe** (cello) – are set to release their sophomore album “The Runaround” on Oct. 8.

Grammy-nominated artist **Ben Kweller** produced the outstanding new record, helping the band capture their music's freak-folk spirit and channel it into the recording.

The Austin-based indie ensemble has fashioned a unique sound that blends elements of rock, jazz, gypsy folk and a touch of baroque with a loose carnival-esque vibe. The band's diverse instrumentation – including ukulele, violin, cello, percussion, keyboards, xylophone, banjo and bells – provides a perfect foundation for [Wild Child](#)'s playful, and sometimes dark, take on love, loss and heartbreak.

The talented sextet sat down with me before a recent show to chat about the new album and regale me with mind-bending stories about their brief but eventful career.

The gifted Beggins professed to being a fan of equally talented “ukulele god” **Jake Shimabukuro** – if not a fan of pronouncing his *name*. “Yeah, I watch a lot of his YouTube videos. I kind of got into the ukulele after the fact.”

“I didn't go in with ‘ukulele heroes’ or anything, but I started playing it and wanted to get better. In our age, one way to do that is to watch YouTube. I found him and I was like, ‘What the f\*\*k! That guy's *real* good and I'm doing really sh\*\*ily and there's no real lesson to be learned from him!’”

“I spotted a ukulele in Boston the other day, which is my first, actual ukulele. I play a baritone ukulele, which is the big ukulele. It's pretty much the bottom four strings of a guitar, or the top however you look at it. So I just bought a new tenor ukulele and have been plucking around with that the last couple of days, pretending like I'm Jake Shushumishushoshua – I can never remember his name.”

Communicative shortcomings aside, it's a bit of a stretch to get one's head around a ukulele player from Houston winding up with a classically trained musician from Wimberley, Texas. But Beggins was confident as to the reason. “Total luck, I guess.”

“Yeah, I was playing music with our drummer, Carey,” added Wilson, “and he was helping put a Danish psychedelic back band together for this guy called **The Migrant**, 'cause he was going on a U.S. tour and he needed people to play for him.”

“He asked me if I would jump on as a violinist, so I dropped out of school and was like, ‘All right, let's *do* this!’ And then last minute, he made it an accordion, ukulele, banjo – Alex kind of plays everything – and he jumped on the tour as well. So pretty much 24 hours before we left to live in the car together for seven weeks, we met.”

“My whole life, I never thought I could do it seriously,” chimed in Beggins. “Three days before they were leaving for the tour, I was hanging out with my buddy Carey, who was gonna go play drums for this guy.”

“I went to the airport and picked up this guy from Denmark with him and we ended up hanging out all day and Carey was like, ‘You should come, man.’ And I was like, ‘*Could* I? (laughing) Well sh\*\*, I'm still in college. I'll have to figure that out.’”

Wilson recalled, “Remember that one practice we had with them right before we left? We're standing in the room and we had run through the songs a couple of times with the rest of the group without Alex.”

“And he pulls out his accordion and starts playing with me on the violin. We realized very quickly that our job was the *same* job. ‘We’re gonna have to figure out how to make him think that we are both necessary.’ So we’re doing harmonies around each other. ‘Okay, well we’re just the same person pretty much.’”

“But he accepted that and put us on the same microphone every time. We were always right next to each other, always yelling into the same microphone. One time, he tried to separate us onto two different sides of the stage and we – I think on purpose – played the worst show of our lives. Like, ‘You can’t make us stand *anywhere*.’”

“To this day, we’ve *never* crossed where we stand,” offered Beggins.

Fans of Wild Child’s velvety melodies, infectious hooks and wry delivery might be shocked to discover that Magers, Wolfe and Wilson are all classically trained musicians. But the three spirited musicians were quick to point out the benefits of the seemingly starchy training.

“It helped ‘cause it’s the most excruciating and unpleasant thing to study when you are a young kid,” began Wilson, “and you don’t enjoy it *ever*. I did that for about 12 years and then I decided that I hated it.”

“And then I discovered bluegrass and it was this other form of music where you can drink whiskey and you could be barefoot and you could play fast and you can play sloppy and you can do whatever you want.”

“I found another fiddle teacher on the side. And once I started taking lessons from that person, my classical teacher dropped me because I was making my own changes to concertos. I was like, ‘I think it should go like *this*,’ which you don’t do *ever*.”

“If anyone wanted me to jam or play with them, I could do it because if I could master ridiculous 12 minute songs, I could jam with anyone on the guitar. I started playing with hip hop groups and rockabilly groups and anyone that needed anything. That’s how I met Carey when I was 15 and I never played classical music again. But it definitely helped me. I could play *anything* after that.”

“Most piano players probably are too,” added Magers. “For me, it was really like the process of unlearning in a way because it forms a lot of what I do. It might help me get to where I’m going and what I’m trying to tease out a little bit faster than I would be able to without that. But the only ways that it applies are on a subconscious level.”

“Wild Child is the first real proper band I’ve ever been a part of. It’s a *hell* of a lot more fun than playing piano recitals. But there are ways that it helps. Piano in particular is an instrument that can cover so many frequencies, you can do so much with it at once. Finding my slot within a six and sometimes seven-person band was definitely a little bit of a process.”

While it may have taken some effort for the band members to find their respective musical way, the double trio’s songwriting chemistry has been unmistakable from the very beginning, as evidenced by Wild Child’s first exceptional album “[Pillow Talk](#)” and their outstanding follow-up “The Runaround.”

Wolfe provided the most compelling reason as to the extraordinary tunesmithing harmony. “I’d say sadness... happiness... emotions.”

Wilson echoed the sentiment. “We had never written music at all before. We were both in an unhappy place for the first time in our lives and needed something to do about it. I didn’t know that that was happening until we would write the songs and jot down the lyrics. We’d sing them and then it would hit me. ‘Am I *sad*? Am I *sad* right now? Oh my God, that’s *so* sad.”

“It’s naiveté,” added Beggins. “We didn’t know how to write songs. Chris said that when he started playing with us, ‘Your songs are pretty weird and crazy.’ But when we were writing them it was like, ‘Whatever sounds right.’”

Magers provided his succinct insights. “You know the rules so you could break them. Ben Kweller said about a number of our songs – the title track to ‘The Runaround’ in particular – ‘It doesn’t make any sense. These chords don’t make any sense. You can’t make a song with these chords.’”

“I’ve been writing songs for a long time,” confessed McGraw, “and I’ve spent so much time just being over-analytical and trying to be a perfectionist. And I’ve been amazed around both of them.”

“The fact that they’ve knocked out so many songs so fast was like, ‘S\*\*t, I can’t *force* this song.’ They were just whimsically coming up with it and that’s what made it so beautiful. It was just that they weren’t making songs to sell to anybody. People are like, ‘These people have been through something I can relate to and they’re just expressing it. And it just makes me feel like I want to share this with *somebody*.’”

The most mind-boggling thing about the band’s songwriting is that some of the tunes from the first album weren’t actually completed until they were recording them. Wilson provided her perspective on the musical “spontaneous combustion.”

“Yeah, the last song on the album, ‘Tale of You and Me’ wasn’t finished until I was in the vocal booth doing the last thing on the album. I was like, ‘What if I tried *this* and what if we tried *this*?’”

“The songs are so different now ‘cause we’ve been playing them together for a couple years. Before it was just like piecing them together with whoever was there in the studio, whoever we could talk to about it. And now since we’ve all been jamming them and playing them in front of different crowds – if we recorded ‘Pillow Talk’ again now, it would be a *totally* different album.”

“I was learning things about my parts in the songs probably a year after we recorded them,” said Magers. “And I kind of wish that we could go back and redo some things, but at the same time, that was that moment in time.”

“To me, it is exactly as much of a reflection of us as people, as musicians and a band as ‘Pillow Talk’ was. I mean, it is an evolution but there’s nothing disingenuous about it. It’s just coming from more of a place of the core kind of songwriting genesis of the song.”



Magers astutely summed up the band's mind-boggling "eclecticity." "Maybe that's something about this band. Maybe it's some part of the recipe. We all really like a whole bunch of different kinds of music."

Whatever the recipe is, Wild Child is "cookin' with gas." And there's no doubt that things will only get hotter for the powerful sextet. But even with a bright future ahead of them, McGraw discerningly summed things up for Wild Child.

In 10 years I still want to be a fan of Wild Child. Because if people come to me and they're like, 'Oh, I *love* Wild Child!' I'm just gonna be like, 'I believe that you love it because you see me love it.'

"And the second you think we have a bad night, we're just playing these songs and getting it over with, you can smell it a mile away. The people that come to us and they're like, 'Oh, I love it,' it's because you see us and we love it too."

For the sake of all serious music fans out there, let's just hope that the Wild Child love fest continues into perpetuity...