



## THE TALK OF THE TOWN

NOVEMBER 9, 2015

### DEPT. OF FOUR.SOMES HARMONIOUS



The young men of Darlingside have been going to the Levain bakery, on West Seventy-fourth Street, for milk and cookies since they were in a Williams College a-cappella group, almost ten years ago. Now that they're a grownup act—a four-man harmony group, with a new album just out and a national tour under way—they're nostalgic for sim-

pler times. So one recent Thursday they were waiting in line on the steps leading down to the bakery, from which wafted a rich, tingly cloud of sugar.

Harris Pasetliner, a classically trained cellist, who is the youngest (the others call him “the boy”) and the most talkative of the rigorously egalitarian foursome, described the cookies.

“They have a hard exoskeleton,” he said, “but they’re gooey and gelatinous inside.” The faraway look that he wears onstage came into his eyes.

“Would you use those words to describe our music?” Don Mitchell (guitar and banjo) asked.

“If you have a guitar that’s going through a fuzzbox, so that it’s super-warm and gooey, and you mix that with a cello that’s groaning with reverb, it can sound kind of buttery,” Pasetliner said.

The members of Darlingside perform original songs around a single microphone, accompanying their close harmonies with a mix of classical, folk, and hipster instruments, including a Brazilian tambourine, a harmonium, and a mandolin. As with cookies, their sound is all about texture. When their drummer left the group two years ago (“our erstwhile drummer,” as they refer to him), the remaining four redesigned the music around their voices, becoming a sort of neo-barbershop quartet. Sometimes the sunshine breaks out in their harmonies, and it feels like 1965 with David Crosby and the Byrds. At other times, as in “The God of Loss,” the weather is gloomier.

The band plumped for four of the bakery’s signature six-ounce cookies, and four milks. “Whole, please,” Pasetliner added. “And an itemized receipt.” Then they strolled toward Central Park.

“We don’t tend toward cities,” Pasetliner said as they crossed Columbus Avenue, explaining that after Williams they had all lived together in a house in Hadley, Massachusetts, where the band got started. “We moved in, set up a studio in the basement, said, ‘O.K., we’re doing this as a career,’ and then realized we didn’t know what kind of music we wanted to play.” A sort of folk pop, as it turned out.

Now they all live near one another, in Cambridge. On occasion, they write lyrics at the local climbing gym.

“We’ll climb, hop off, write some lyrics, and then climb again,” Auyon

Mukharji, the band’s Suzuki-trained violinist, said. “The puzzle of how to go up the wall is like the puzzle of writing lyrics—go here, then here, then here.”

“It was all good until three of us got finger injuries,” Pasetliner said.

Finding a leafy bower just inside the park, the four nibbled their cookies and sipped their milk, and seemed to become enveloped in a Proustian daydream. Their reverie was soon disturbed by an anxious-looking off-leash Alsatian,



*Darlingside*

which approached with a soft Frisbee in its mouth. Mitchell winged the Frisbee, and the dog darted away.

“That’s a cute dog,” Pasetliner said.

The dog became less cute each time it returned and buried the saliva-soaked Frisbee in Mitchell’s crotch.

“He’s certainly eager,” Mukharji noted.

Mitchell began to cast searching glances in the direction of the dog’s oblivious owner. Meanwhile, Dave Senft, the bass player, explained that the group had originally wanted to call themselves Darlingcide, a neologism based on Arthur Quiller-Couch’s advice to self-indulgent young writers—“murder your darlings”—which they had first heard in a song-writing class at Williams. But they worried that fans would pronounce the name “Darling-kyed” or “Darling-seed-a.”

Soon another dog came over to sniff the Alsatian’s behind, but caught a whiff of something more appealing—the half-eaten chocolate-chip cookies—which it proceeded to devour. The members of Darlingside decided it was time to move on.

—John Seabrook