

# The New York Times

## Booming

MUSIC MATCH

### If You Like Carter and Cash. . .



June Carter Cash and Johnny Cash performing in 1975.

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*Each week, Val Haller, a music-obsessed baby boomer and the founder of the Web site [Vallist.com](http://Vallist.com), matches artists from her generation with those of her 20-something sons' generation.*

A year ago my friend Jake Samuels, general manager for the Chicago-area music spot Evanston Space, whispered in my ear about a new band to watch. "This will be big," he predicted. As usual, he was right. Shovels and Rope is a husband and wife country rock duo — Michael Trent and Cary Ann Hearst, based in Charleston, S.C. They like to say they are "making as much noise as they can" with two old guitars, a kick drum, snare, harmonica, tambourine and occasional keyboard. I dare to match them with the couple that set the standard for country duets, Johnny Cash and June Carter. Both couples share Southern roots and that music-from-the-back porch country sound, and all involved had solo careers first and showed their affection for each other onstage.



## JOHNNY CASH AND JUNE CARTER

He was born in 1932 in Arkansas, she three years earlier in Virginia. He was one of seven children who worked the family farm; she was part of the first family of country music, performing as the Carter Sisters. He wrote songs like "Pick'n Time" and "Look at Them Beans" about growing up poor in Arkansas. She played autoharp and rhythm guitar and charmed her audiences.

He worked in an automotive plant and enlisted in the Air Force. She studied acting in New York, making guest spots on soap operas and westerns. Each was a favorite at the Grand Ole Opry.

Carter was introduced to Cash's music by her friend Elvis Presley. At the time Cash had released his hit songs "Folsom Prison Blues" and "I Walk the Line," which reached Billboard's No. 1 spot and remained on the charts for 43 weeks. They came to know each other onstage, when Carter occasionally opened for him. John R. Cash married Valerie June Carter in 1968. They produced a son as well as a string of hits including "It Ain't Me Babe" and "Jackson" (which reached No. 2 on the country charts in 1967) and were awarded a Grammy for best country and western duet. Their sound mixed country, rockabilly, rock 'n' roll, blues, folk and gospel. A sign of their extraordinary crossover success: they were inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the Gospel Music Hall of Fame. To the end, Cash and Carter were a pair: they died four months apart in 2003.



## SHOVELS AND ROPE

In The Huffington Post, Michael Bialas describes Michael Trent of Shovels and Rope as a "Denver dude" and his bandmate/wife, Cary Ann Hearst, a "Mississippi missy." Mr. Trent attended private school and didn't love it. At a young age, Ms. Hearst learned songwriting and how to sing harmony from her stepfather. Before Ms. Hearst and Mr. Trent met, each released solo records. Each was in a relationship. But their lives intersected in Charleston, S.C. She loved his band the Films, describing them as being "like Euro-trash, but completely Wild West." They occasionally played in each other's bands, at times wrote songs together, married and for a while continued making music apart. After they merged their acts things started to click fast; soon they were doing as many as 200 shows a year. They are booked for The Bowery Ballroom in New York on Jan. 31.

Their recent album, "O' Be Joyful," was one of my favorites of 2012. I've blared it in my car, streamed it at home over the holidays and played it for my 80-year-old parents — who loved it, too. My friend Jake hosted Shovels and Rope for a small private concert at Space last month. Between songs, Ms. Hearst chats and tells stories in her country style. "Met a lot of great folks out there along the highways, byways, cornfields and cow pies," she tells them. "Thanks to all the clubs and promoters, sound guys and gals, barkeeps and night sweeps that have played host to us so far."

While they are country, there is an edgy, punk, raucous side to go with their beautiful harmonies. John Richards of National Public Radio noted, "Sometimes you just know that a band isn't going to have to wait long before it reaches the stardom you think it deserves."