

Q&A with The Railers

Written by Melissa Larsen

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Late last month, brothers Jordan and Jonathan Lawson, Tyler Oban and Jonathan's wife Cassandra Lawson—also known as up-and-coming country band, The Railers, took the stage at Beach Ball. After an energy-packed performance, AZFoothills.com chatted with the band, which has gained accolades from Rolling Stone and recently made their Opry debut. And did we mention that the Lawsons all hail from Arizona?

AFM: How was the Beach Ball?

Jonathan Lawson: The Beach Ball performance was awesome. We were so excited to see so much enthusiasm and support in raising money for Phoenix Children's Hospital. Three of us come from Arizona so it is a cause that is near and dear to our heart. It was amazing to see everyone stepping up and giving freely.

AFM: How would you describe your sound?

Jonathan Lawson: It is sort of a hillbilly Fleetwood Mac and Eagles combination with a little Nickel Creek thrown in for good measure. On this album, we have been working with a producer named Justin Niebank. When we first sat down with Justin to try to talk through what the album would sound like and crafting our sound, there was sort of a desire to do something that is still old school but had bluegrass and folk instruments with mandolin and fiddle. But we also want to bring a modern-ness to that. So I think what was done is a big fusion between old Americana and new country, and that is what makes it fit in our format today.

AFM: What brought you from Missouri, where you were born and raised, to Northern Arizona University, Jonathan and Jordan?

Jonathan Lawson: We grew up mostly in Missouri, until I was about 11 years old. My dad wound up at an Edward Jones office in phoenix, and then an office opened up in Safford. So I did middle school and high school there. And then Jordan and I both went up to NAU to study violin.

Jordan Lawson: It is a cool town to go to college in because you get outdoor experiences, skiing and mountain climbing. It was a really cool experience.

AFM: Cassandra, you also went to NAU. Have you shown Tyler around Arizona?

TO: We were down on Mount Graham in Southern Arizona. For years, I have been hoping to see a bald eagle in the wild. We drove up to the top of Mount Graham and were hanging out on the lake up there. And I saw my first bald eagle in action.

AFM: As classically trained musicians, how did you end up in country music?

CL: It one of those crazy things where we all trained as classical musicians, but our hearts were born and bred for the folk-country-Americana vibe. The boys were playing bluegrass, and I sang into my hairbrush every country song you can imagine. We were going to Country Thunder. It was so much a part of our lives when we were growing up; it just felt like a natural fit when we moved to Nashville. The reason we studied classical music is because we were all on scholarship for it, and [NAU] didn't offer a commercial program at the time. So wanted to finish our education, and we transferred out to Nashville.

AFM: What was the moment you realized that you had made it?

CL: We have been fortunate enough to have some cool times over the years for us. When we were all getting ready to quit our day jobs and do this full time, we had amazing support from the people we were surrounded by and one of those is Sara Evans. She gave us our first opening slot. And just having her have our back, it was a huge step in the right direction for us. And after that, it kept trickling in. We still stay in touch with Sara, so she is our anchor point. Being able to do everything from playing at Stagecoach to our Opry debut, which I can't even begin to describe—there are so many milestones. As long as those keep happening, we are going to keep on playing.

AFM: You play Country Thunder next month. What can concert-goers expect at a show?

CL: We always tell people it is like drinking a Red Bull. We try to capture the energy and spark of our songs and match that. We have so much energy. It is really fun to connect with our fans. It is really what is important—to show them some love and have a big ole party with them.

AFM: What are your goals for the year?

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Jonathan Lawson: We are getting ready to get our album finished right now. We have been jamming on that for the first couple months so far this year, and we are really close. We are trying to get it wrapped up and narrow it down to the best 11 songs we can come up with. We are expecting to put out a new single in May. I am sure we will be coming back to Phoenix to hang out and support that. We can't wait to be able to put that out.

CL: It is so important to us—especially in our home state—to stay connected and participate and volunteer as much as we can. Especially with this new music coming out.