

# Vintage Wildflowers: 'In Full Bloom'

By Chuck Bloom  
Ceili editor

Within seconds of completing an aural review of Vintage Wildflowers latest album, "In Full Bloom," I immediately sought my notes on what was written about the first recording effort (2009's "The Upstairs Sessions" when the group went by the name, Crossroads).

Here is what was said in the *Ceili* review in 2009:

... their past performance collaboration did not include vocals.

'We only started singing in March of last year; we were thrilled to find out that Abby also sang after joining us,' Maher said. 'We were looking for someone who would be very collaborative and interested in really working towards developing our own sound and style within the Celtic-traditional genre.'

In fact, for a group that only added vocals to its repertoire, the results are outstanding."

Today, even with a change in personnel, the vocals remain outstanding and the women have taken their sound to a different level on their third album. Vocals now dominate most of the recorded offerings, but not at the expense of the individual instrumental talents.

The current Vintage Wildflowers lineup, based in Tulsa, is led by Dana Fitzgerald Maher on Celtic harp, piano and harmony vocals, Abby Bozarth on fiddle, mandolin, harmony vocals, guitar and relative newcomer (since 2011) Audrey Schmidt as lead vocalist, playing bass and guitar.

Maher, an adjunct professor of piano at the University of Tulsa, teaches classical piano and is principal pianist for Tulsa's



Signature Symphony. Her harp playing days only began in 2006. Bozarth has been playing the fiddle and performing since she was 8.

What "In Full Bloom" represents is a full maturation process of this talented all-female trio.

They open the CD with an instrumental collection, "Rakes of Kildare Set," before putting their *a capella* stamp on the Barra McNeils' "Coaltown Road," which they undoubtedly heard performed at a past North Texas Irish Festival by the Canadian group itself.

In fact, the ladies prefer their vocals to go without instrument support and do it very, very well on the sorrowful

"I Am Stretched On Your Grave" and the CD closer, the spiritual "Down In The River to Pray," which was lifted to the musical heaven in the Coen Brothers' classic movie, "O' Brother Where Art Thou."

One of the tracks, "One, I Love," is a re-creation from their initial album – excellent then, excellent now. This time, it is highlighted by Maher's vocals and piano accompaniment.

As said, the increased vocalization of their presentation has not diminished their instrumental abilities, as heard on such tracks as "Swan LK 243," "Harp Tunes" and "Fisherman's Set."

As one of the only all-female groups in the Southwest U.S. region, Vintage Wildflowers not only has carved a unique niche within the Celtic scene, but continues to strive and improve with each performance and each album.

"In Full Bloom" represents a giant step on that journey.

## Bilge Pumps

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"There would be a varying number of us rolling along the dirt paths, anywhere from 5 to 25 depending on the time of day as many of us were busy tending booths, dealing with cast members, or putting on assorted stage shows, including the Dragon Attack Stunt Show and the Scottish Caledonian Games," Lutke explained. "We've played everywhere from giant stages, opening for the likes of the Temptations, Three Dog Night, and Deep Purple, to fun-filled festivals where the audiences get what you're about, to middle-of-the-night shows at nudist colonies in the hills outside of Los Angeles.

"We managed to get through just fine and set the tone for what's been a lovely 15-year journey."

The current lineup – Lutke, David Ruf-



fin, Ted Dossey, Christopher Dallion, Nathan Campbell – has been in place for the past five years, and while a capella is the primary method of musical delivery, each member provides additional skills, ranging

from percussion instruments to guitar.

"We've had many different members over the years, to the point where if there was a West Side Story-style showdown between ex-members and current members, the current members would be wiped out in terms of sheer tonnage," Lutke laughingly added.

The presentation, replete with colorful pirate garb, is more attuned towards faires and events with a medieval theme. But the set list includes songs about sailors, pirates and a fascinating world which is an integral part of Celtic music.

"Bail Money" is one such voyage on the open musical waters.

For more information on the group, go to [www.thebilgepumps.com](http://www.thebilgepumps.com).