A closer look: Parlours

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A CLOSER LOOK:

PARLOURS

An Indie-folk-pop band hailing from Des Moines, Iowa? We had to get a closer look.

They’ve recently released their self-titled EP, and their soulful and nostalgic sound aims to please a very diverse audience. Parlours is made up of the regionally and nationally known acts Dana Halferty and Scott Yoshimura on vocals, Wayde Stover on drums, Erik Knudtson on guitar, and Steve Bergeron on the violin and keys.

We had a chance to catch up with lead singer and guitarist Dana Halferty from Des Moines, Iowa, and this is what she had to say.

ERICA LANSMAN

So where did the name of your band originate?

I lived in Oak/Elm at Iowa State University and would go into the dorm hall/parlour to write music. On my computer I’d save the demos as “Parlours demo(s)” A couple years later I started recording music seriously and was debating names, I didn’t know what to call the band. I referenced the demo name.

How did you get started singing and writing music?

I write all the lyrics and have been writing since I was 14. It’s a pretty simple process. I pick instruments that are typically rhythmic and start with them. Sometimes I think of it in the car and record on my cell phone.
How did growing up in the Midwest (and going to Iowa State) affect you as a musician as far as writing or touring?

I live in Des Moines now, and I think the Midwest is an extremely relational place. My fiancé, not being from Iowa, comments on how Iowans and people of the Midwest are so “people focused.” We (Iowans/Midwesterners) really care about our friends. We aren’t as cool as other places, we don’t have the same fashion sense or culture, but we have a strong suit for relationships.

And music is relationships. I write about people that I love, people that have hurt me or people who I’ve hurt. I love people. I love my friends. Relationships are me.

Friendships within music can be built around the idea of “What can that person do for me?” But for me, it’s what can that person do for me – it’s “Do you like that person?”

What are your musical inspirations?

I hope that no one listens to our songs and says we’re ripping off another band. Hopefully we don’t give off that vibe. But there are definitely bands that I like a lot.

I like Fleetwood Mac, Iron and Wine, and I respect Stevie Nicks for her music writing. I listen to random records my grandma gave me.

Other bands would be Death Cab for Cutie; Ben Gibbered [the lead singer for Death Cab for Cutie] is a good music lyric writer. He knows what he’s doing and his words are spot on. He writes catchy melodies, and they have a distinguished sound.

What do you hope for the future of Parlours?

In the immediate future, we are quite a ways into recording full the length album.

We hope to release early next year, and the album will be all new songs. After that we want to tour. I love being on the road! It is a giant excuse to travel and meet people. If I wasn’t in a band I would be a nomad in the world who would just travel and meet people.

Playing music is great. I want to tour more and grow our fan base. We all love music. But we are better at being friends; we’re still working on the musician thing. They [bandmates] are first my friends and second, my bandmates.

Tell us more about recording the EP:

I never stop writing music, and some of the things I write are never complete or shown to anyone.

Some of the songs I wrote a while ago or the week before. The EP was an experiment and I wanted to record five songs, which is what I had a budgeted for. The other current band members, Eric and Scott, helped a lot with this process. We went into the studio and most songs had never been played live. Eric and Scott really helped build the songs, and since then they’ve completely helped define the Parlours sound.

I read on your website that you collaborated with Threadless.com. How was the experience?

It was really great; he emailed us out of the blue. One of our songs was on a TV show, Chicago Code, and Threadless is based in Chicago. It was really fun and is the coolest place to work. It has an arcade room. They brew their own beer, and really good music was always playing.

It was humbling and they were so generous to us. We are just a baby band; so new. Musicians like Kate Nash and other people I respect had played there before us.

I also downloaded Parlours Daytrotter session. How did that opportunity occur? How was that experience?

Same situation as Threadless; I was so surprised they asked us. They asked to play us before we even realized the EP. The e-mail read: “We would love to get you in the Daytrotter session.” We hadn’t played any shows yet… We thought it was a joke. But it was real!

It was so awesome to be among the bands on Daytrotter. So many bands have done Daytrotter, so being invited so early on... It was surprising. We actually went to record in February [released in July]. We had been playing some shows in the Southeast, and they’re based in Rock Island, Illinois.

You really just go in and do the songs. And that’s it! We were super new at that point.