

# Hereditary Advantages

**Just Harmony and Amy Gallatin & Stillwaters both benefit from their musical family roots**

By Dan Barry

Inspired by the folk revival of the 1960s and the American Jewish folk movement, as they state on their Web site, **Just Harmony** use their music as a vehicle for social and political change. It's not just rhetoric, either: They have an undiminished hippie idealism (check out those tie-dyed dresses) that lets them tackle "Peace Train" head-on. The five-piece band played at the Russell Library in Middletown this past Thursday, and, true to their name, they exhibited a stunning consistency when it came to their vocals. Over and over, they nailed perfect harmonies, making it look effortless while each member's voice retained a distinct personality and role.

Just Harmony is a family affair. The bulk of the band is the Eppler-Epstein family, with mother and father Steve and Amy leading the arrangements while daughters Rebecca and Sarah take supporting vocal roles. Even though Rick Calvert may be the odd man out, he clearly spends enough time around the Eppler-Epsteins to be a de facto family member, the end result being a lively banter that makes the audience feel familial, too.

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On Sunday night, I discovered an exciting summer concert series at the Manchester Band Shell near Manchester Community College. Of course, the series is old news to many folks — this is its 32nd season, and a crowd of at least 100 people had assembled to see **Amy Gallatin & Stillwaters**, a bluegrass four-piece. The Glastonbury-based band features Gallatin on lead vocals, Roger Williams on dobro and vocals, his son J.D. Williams on mandolin, and John Urbanik on standup bass and vocals.

Gallatin's and Williams' voices make for fantastic bittersweet harmonies (although the Band Shell's mixing board made them deafeningly loud). Their original "40 80 or 10" was a heart-ripping tune about traveling cross-country to visit a lover. Both Williams took masterful solos, easily picking



Amy Gallatin and Roger Williams of the Glastonbury-based Stillwaters.

up where the other left off and proving, like Just Harmony, that sharing blood with your bandmates lends a strategic advantage. The only limitation seemed to be that there wasn't any other spice or improvisation — either the singers were singing, or a Williams was soloing. It may have been true to tradition, and such simple song structures would be perfect if Stillwaters was playing at a barn dance. But playing in the gargantuan Band Shell to an aged and seated audience, Stillwaters could have benefited from the addition of brass, violin, or accordion to really let her rip. ■

*There are tons of free concerts this summer at the Manchester Band Shell, including **Hard Lincoln** playing '60s, '70s, and '80s music on Friday, July 17; **Fiesta Del Norte** playing Mexican mariachi music on Sunday, July 26; and **Shaded Soul's** Top 40 Dance Music on Sunday, Aug. 2. You can see the full listings at [ManchesterBand-Shell.com](http://ManchesterBand-Shell.com).*

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