

Banjo legends perform at Orkney Springs

By Rachel Mahoney

Folk, bluegrass and lots of banjo plucking will resonate at Orkney Springs for the Hot Strings and Cool Breezes Roots MiniFest today evening as part of the Shenandoah Valley Music Festival.

Audiences can take their seats on the lawn and in the pavilion at the Shrine Mont venue starting at 5 p.m. to see the shows start at 6.

Three area bands will contribute their own flavors of folk, bluegrass and roots: The Honey Dewdrops out of Baltimore, Bourbon Barrel Congress from Staunton and Save the Arcadian from Fredericksburg — performing for the last time under that name before they switch over to Wylder.

This year, the minifest's headliners are banjo legends Béla Fleck and Abigail Washburn, who married their distinct sounds — literally — in a self-titled album they released in October 2014. The couple began touring in 2013 with their young son Juno in tow.

Fleck has played jazz, funk and even a self-composed banjo concerto on tours and concerts with various groups, including two previous performances at the festival. In 2009, he performed with Malian kora musician Toumani Diabate and in 2011 he performed with his jazz group the Flecktones. He's won 15 Grammy awards in multiple contexts since 1995 and has paved the way for new frontiers in banjo music.

Washburn plays banjo in the rhythmically and visually distinct clawhammer style and has played a hand in seven albums, many of them bluegrass chart-toppers. From what her website bio describes as a "17-year relationship with China," she has sung multiple songs in Chinese and frequently incorporates Chinese melodic elements into her work.

Mike Spory and his wife Pat have come to the festival from Warren County for multiple years, catching Fleck at his 2011 performance. They made plans to enjoy the contemporary

bluegrass featured at today's MiniFest when they first learned Fleck and Washburn would be performing.

"They're top of their field in banjo playing," Mike Spory said. "They play the banjo completely differently but they work well together."

Spory said they've come out for classical performances in past years and sat on the lawn, but this year they're opting for pavilion tickets in order to sit closer and see the performance.

Although Fleck and Washburn played with Punch Brothers at Wolf Trap in Vienna Friday evening, Spory said the warm and welcoming atmosphere of the Shrine Mont venue in Orkney Springs is a preferable local venue with a beautiful view.

"It has a feel about it. I like it being at the mountain, I like being close," he said.

Contact staff writer Rachel Mahoney at 540-465-5137 ext. 164, or rma-honey@nvdaily.com.