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When Jenny Lewis, the singer of the indie-pop outfit Rilo Kiley, released her 2006 solo debut *R abbit Fur Coat*
, she credited the album to Jenny Lewis with the Watson Twins.

That small act of generosity is the primary reason that the Watson Twins -- who will perform a Daytrotter.com show at The Speakeasy on August 18 -- have their current visibility.

This isn't to say the Kentucky-raised identical twins based in Los Angeles didn't play an important role on the record, but the Watson sisters (to put it bluntly) provide backing vocals for Lewis' songs. Yet there they are behind Lewis on the cover, in setting and dress suggesting the creepy dead girls from *The Shining* all grown up. And a little less creepy, and a lot less dead.

The Watson Twins certainly didn't expect that kind of exposure from the project. "We really loved the songs, and our collaboration ... came very easy," Chandra Watson said in a phone interview last week. "Lewis is a very modest person, and she wasn't really making that big a deal out of it."

"It had the feeling of a side project," Leigh Watson said. "Rilo Kiley was starting to really get big at that point." But *Rabbit Fur Coat* was well-reviewed and a hit for an indie record, and "two months of touring turned into a year on the road," Leigh said.

The Watsons sang in the church from age nine but found alternative music in their teenage years, resulting in a style that mixed the two. "The music that we were writing had more of that indie vibe to it, but the vocals still held onto that more gospel-sounding cadence," Leigh said. "The thing that we honed the most in singing in church was harmonies; that was probably the biggest carryover. It was more tonal and vocal performance and harmonies than the music itself."

The twins arrived in Los Angeles in 1998 with their eyes on a music career. The years between their California arrival and their national "arrival" involved singing in the band Slydell, making connections, learning to record, and exploring different styles of music. "I consider that our musical college experience or grad school or whatever you want to call it," Leigh said. Slydell broke up -- after three albums -- at about the time Lewis was looking for backup singers.

The Watson Twins released the EP *Southern Manners* at about the same time as *Rabbit Fur Coat* , and touring behind those led to the pair's debut full-length, 2008's *Fire Songs* . "By the time we got off the road with *Rabbit Fur Coat* , we knew that we had a stack of songs, that we wanted to make a real record," Leigh said. "It ultimately gave us the courage to do that, to have this experience on the road, the musical confidence to feel like vocally we can pull this off, and we have something to offer."

Fire Songs certainly has its strong points, but as Pitchfork.com said, the album "highlighted those voices primarily by stripping everything else away, leaving their vocals to anchor subpar

songs, and an anonymous musical backdrop ... ."

"*Fire Songs* was a very safe record for us to make, and we needed to make a safe record because we weren't there yet," Chandra said. "We needed to do what we felt comfortable in doing, and where we had come from with the music. ... With *Talking to You, Talking to Me*, we were ready to push ourselves in a different way."

Talking to You, Talking to Me is the Watson Twins' new album, released in February. It announces itself immediately with "Modern Man" and "Harpeth River," both of which put those voices in the service of the songs, rather than the other way around. *Spin* called the album "a massive improvement. Taking a cue from Shelby Lynne, the Watsons consult vintage Southern styles for inspiration, incorporating touches of country and plenty of hot-blooded soul. The only problem with 'Calling Out,' 'Forever Me,' and other alluring tracks is that they end too soon ... ."

Chandra credited the freewheeling nature of the album to the tour time supporting Lewis, *Southern Manners*, and *Fire Songs*: "When you spend a lot of time on the road, something happens to you as a performer where you gain confidence, and you really get to know yourself and you get to know your voice. We really found a confidence in ourself to explore."

The Watson Twins will perform on Wednesday, August 18, at Circa '21's The Speakeasy (1818 Third Avenue in Rock Island). The bill also includes Tennis, Ferraby Lionhart, and Idpyramid. Tickets to the 7 p.m. all-ages show are $8 in advance and $10 at the door. For tickets, e-mail teamdaytrotter@gmail.com.

For more information on the Watson Twins, visit TheWatsonTwins.com or MySpace.com/thewatsontwins.

To read an interview with Tennis, click here .