



Family. Love. Harmony. They're three simple words that can mean anything to pretty much everybody. But for The Harters, they embody a way of life that means just about everything. First and foremost, Michael, Leslie and Scott are siblings. And as brothers and sister, they share a familial love rooted in a lifetime of music. So far, pretty simple. Yet as country music has begun to discover – and their forthcoming debut album proves – The Harters play and sing together with a sound that soars beyond mere 'harmonizing' to the place where breakthrough artists are born. "Family, love and harmony all mean the same thing to us," explains older brother Michael. "We're three different people with one unifying approach. We don't write, play, or sing conventionally, and our music can't be 'airbrushed'. We are," he says with a laugh, "incapable of being anything other than exactly who we are."

It's who The Harters are – individually and collectively – that make all the difference. "None of it would work without each one of us," says sister Leslie. "Michael brings the traditional country sound. Scott's comes from a more rock background. I listen to and love everything. And when we get together, there's this weird magic that happens." For younger brother Scott, it's their diverse influences and personalities that create the unifying thread. "We're all stubborn to a certain degree," he explains, "and none of us are willing to be part of something we don't believe in. I think of us as three circles that meet. Where they overlap is where our music is."

The Harters were virtually born into music in their Arizona home, where their earliest childhood memories are of their father playing guitar and singing Beatles and Hank Williams songs. “We’d sit around the living room with our two older sisters Shannon and Brandy, listening to our dad,” Leslie remembers. “After every song, the five of us would yell, ‘Do it again!’ Our mom is a really talented writer who taught us the importance of words and lyrics. Me, Michael and Scott just absorbed it all.” And while the Harter kids loved to bang on the family’s old upright piano, it was at their cabin on the outskirts of Flagstaff where the siblings’ true music gifts would coalesce. “We’d go there every weekend and all summer,” says Michael. “After our parents’ divorce, the cabin was our only constant.” By their early teens, they had begun to forge their indelible harmony – musical and otherwise – around a nearly constant campfire. “From the time we got up until the time we went to sleep, we would light a bonfire and sing,” Leslie says. “We still do. The cabin is a place that grounds you immediately to who you are and where you come from. ”

Soon amidst years of college, day jobs, and marriage, divorce and single-motherhood, all three Harters would dream of individual – and very different – music careers. Michael had moved to Nashville to become a country songwriter/performer. Scott, who had learned guitar at 11, was going to school in San Diego and gigging in alternative rock bands. As for perpetually headstrong Leslie, the decision was both instant and irrevocable. “When I was 18 years old, I decided one day that this is what I’m going to do,” she remembers. “I called my dad and asked if I could borrow our grandfather’s guitar. He asked why, and I told him that I was going to teach myself to play. After I got the guitar, I had him teach me to tune by ear over the phone. I wrote my first song within a few hours.” Still, the idea of performing together never crossed their minds. “When you’re young and wanting to be a recording artist,” Leslie says, “the least cool idea is to do it with your brothers.”

One night at their grandmother’s house, everything would change. “I’d moved back from Nashville,” Michael recalls, “and Leslie and I were thinking about being a duo. Scott had just come home from San Diego with some songs he’d written. The three of us started harmonizing on a song out on the back patio. After a while, my dad said, ‘I don’t know why you three don’t just sing together as a group.’ To our minds, the three of us singing and playing together was always just something we did around the campfire. Why would we try to do that professionally?” Still unsure, the three began a tentative collaboration. “When we first started doing this, we still didn’t know what we were,” says Scott. “Then came a song called ‘We All Fall Down’. The three of us sat down and wrote it, and these harmony parts just emerged. It was totally different from anything we’d ever done before. We’d found our sound. Suddenly we’d figured out that we didn’t have to be like anybody else. We could be us.”

What The Harters had found was a sound totally original and rooted in a bond that was wholly unbreakable. The three soon realized they were instinctive songwriters, able to craft inventive melodies and imaginative lyrics through some mystery combination of DNA and ESP. “When we get together, it just happens,” says Michael. “In fact, the majority of the album was written around the campfire in Flagstaff.” Scott and Michael lay down instrumentation both elegiac and insistent, Michael on their grandfather’s acoustic guitar and Scott on acoustic and electric guitar, mandolin and bouzouki. Individually, their vocals are as distinctive as their personalities – Michael’s clear and confident twang, reminiscent of vintage Garth; Scott’s warm yet versatile power, fusing back porch and barroom; and Leslie’s fearless melisma that channels a childhood obsession with her mom’s Patsy Cline records via Annie Lennox and The Cranberries. But it’s when the three come together in harmony that they create ‘The Harters’ Sound’: A pure country choral that can convey joy, pain and hope, often all within the same song. It is a startlingly beautiful and seamlessly natural harmony that surprises nobody more than The Harters themselves. “I’m not sure how the harmonies happen,” Leslie says. “If someone came along and asked us to teach them, we couldn’t. It’s always been second nature to us, and technically we don’t even sing harmony correctly. But it works like nothing else we’ve heard.”

Superstar songwriter/producer Keith Stegall would soon agree. “They played for me, and it was all there,” he says simply. “There were a lot of similarities to great records I grew up with, almost a reinvention of The Mamas & The Papas. Most of all, I liked their songs.” Stegall, producer of over 70 million records sold – including 14 albums by Alan Jackson – decided to record the group’s vocals at Compass Point in The Bahamas, the world famous studio used to create classic albums by Bob Marley, Shania Twain, The Rolling Stones, Wynonna Judd and U2. “There’s no ‘arranging’ of The Harters’ harmonies,” Keith says. “What they do is spontaneous. Sometimes things theoretically aren’t exciting if there’s no tension between the notes. The beauty of The Harters is just letting them do what they do instinctively.”

The buzz on The Harters has been building ever since. Videos of their rehearsals, performances and tracking sessions for songs like ‘Jenny’, ‘Night Ain’t Over Yet’ and ‘Gettin’ Out Of Dodge’ have collected thousands of hits on YouTube. Their live acoustic stint opening for Josh Turner has garnered legions of true believers. Reaction nationwide has been enthusiastic and growing, though Michael and Scott sometimes wish Leslie was a little less forthcoming on Twitter. “I’ve already gotten into trouble for some of my Tweets,” she laughs. “I don’t have a filter at all. Never have. But we love being connected to everyone out there. No joke; every fan that comes into our lives becomes part of our family.”

As the release date of The Harters approaches, Michael, Scott and Leslie continue to write, sing, play, bicker, love and dream, in harmony, as family. “They have a unique optimism and an undying commitment to singing, and they don’t make it much harder than that,” says Keith Stegall. “They just want to get out

there and entertain. It's music and it's fun. That's what they communicate, and that's what I think we've captured." And as the debut single 'Jenny' continues to rack up impressive downloads, Scott believes that their debut speaks for itself. "Our intent was never to make a record that sounded different from anything else," he says. "The goal was to make a record that sounded like us." For Michael, that integrity remains The Harters' greatest gift of all. "We can't sell-out who we are to be something we're not," he says. "Our sound may be different, but our roots are pure country. And being able to do what we're doing now, we're already living the dream." Leslie will gladly share the secret to their success with reasoning as natural and altogether exceptional as The Harters themselves. "We're siblings and we're best friends, and there's nothing hard about doing what you love," she says. "When people ask me, 'what kind of music do you guys sing?' I say 'the good kind'. And when they ask to describe our sound, I tell them that our sound is 'home'. It really does come back to those three words: Family, love and harmony describe everything we are."

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