





# Sound of the sirens

Getting ready for their Camp Bestival show,  
the Exeter duo speak to **Fergus Byrne**

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Despite already releasing five albums and a basketful of EPs and singles, Exeter duo ‘Sound of the Sirens’ still juggle the day-to-day grind of teaching jobs and parenting alongside song-writing, album production and touring.

Currently writing and rehearsing material for a new album due out later this year, Hannah Wood and Abbe Martin will be playing at Camp Bestival at the end of July and have just announced dates for an Autumn tour.

I caught up with them on their ‘writing day’ as they are both relatively recent parents and have managed to get their children into the same nursery allowing them to spend most of the day together working on new songs. On the day I chat with them they take a break and are snuggled into Abbe’s ‘little teaching space’ where she works with students helping them to sing and write songs.

The duo are known for a slew of great lyrics delivered with at times heart-wrenching and often poignant performance, usually interspersed with a few powerful foot-stomping anthemic folk/rock songs that make for very memorable live shows.

They are very ‘open’ says Hannah. Whilst some musicians and writers may hide their own experiences and feelings inside lyrics or stories, Abbe and Hannah ‘love the drama’ of talking about the challenges of life, whether that’s about struggling with relationships, mental health, tragedy or just irritation at the behaviour of those around them. Somewhat refreshingly they don’t see themselves as ‘activists’. When it comes to writing about political or protest subjects Abbe jokes: ‘Go and speak to Billy Bragg!’ Their songs are about life and the feelings that invade our day-to-day existence—from loneliness to love.

Hannah insists that, although occasionally a globally political theme such as environment might find its way into a tune, she believes that unless you are an expert on whatever political subject you’re writing about, it’s best to avoid it. ‘I think I am political deep down in my core’ she says, ‘but I don’t know the information well enough to be outspoken about it.’ Abbe agrees that there are occasionally lyrics that might be a bit ‘ambiguous’, where a song could be interpreted in more than one way and indeed, she

says, in some cases conversations in both subjects might have contributed to those lyrics. ‘But I don’t think we would ever publicly put ourselves out there as writing strong political music saying “these are our beliefs”, purely because I think it does divide people,’ she explains.

Abbe points out that ‘our views change all the time—as they should’ and that most people are ‘in flux and changing their beliefs a lot’. She says that ‘because we’re learning and developing all the time’ if you say something on a big stage somewhere, and it upsets people, it will never be forgotten. She agrees that ‘unless you’re very, very savvy, and you’re very up there with the knowledge’ you’re better off to just listen. Hannah sees the benefit of music to cleanse the soul. ‘I like to think of us as a place where people go to escape that and feel good’ she says.

I ask if their teaching experiences ever inspire their own writing. ‘All the time’ they chime together in an obviously unrehearsed yet endearing example of their natural harmony. Abbe shows me a notelet with a line that one of her students said to her recently, it is a line that was born to be in a song and may some day end up in one of theirs. Frustratingly, not every lyric or melody idea gets used. Hannah remembers how she was doing back-to-back teaching sessions the previous day and was so busy that she lost the paper she used to jot down the many ideas that arose from those sessions.

In the meantime, other inspirations are closer to home. On the current album, *Seasons*, the track *Winter’s Song* is about Abbe’s daughter and *Song for Sulli* is about Hannah’s son. Both songs are a poignant reminder of the power of parenthood in bringing change.

Both Hannah and Abbe had musical interests when growing up but came to where they are now from quite different directions. Hannah’s father had always been in a band and encouraged her to be a musician. After spending time gigging with various different bands, she remembers after a particular relationship break up, she decided she really needed to build her confidence and signed up to go to college to study acting. ‘I absolutely hated it’ she remembers. ‘I had to run around pretending to be a monkey and I had



so many inhibitions.' She loved to dance but says she was always at the back of the class 'out of time, legs everywhere. I really struggled with the whole performing thing, but I loved to sing'. Singing was her saviour and after college she met Abbe while working at a nightclub in Exeter called Timepiece.

Although Abbe didn't have any musicians in her family, she cites her father's voice and the family's enjoyment of singing as an influence. 'Music was just a big thing in our house' she recalls. 'On any kind of big road trip, we'd all be singing songs together, and everyone assumed their parts.' As she got older, she found she enjoyed performing. 'Any kind of performance—I loved it.'

A song on the album *Seasons* is a beautiful tribute to

Abbe's father who died with Alzheimer's a couple of years ago. Entitled *Let us Walk* it is a message to her father telling him how much she would love him to see how his granddaughter is doing. "I'd love to tell you how she's grown, how her laugh tears me apart" she sings. "Let us walk, it's all that I would wish for, her little hand in yours, then I wouldn't have to miss you anymore". The song succinctly describes those fleeting moments when we wish our parents were around to see where we are today.

*Seasons* is the duo's 5th album and along with other albums and singles can be purchased from their website [www.soundofthesirens.uk](http://www.soundofthesirens.uk). They are playing at Camp Bestival in Dorset on Friday 26th July, 2024.