

# MOUNTAINS

## Fates perform on video benefiting Safe Passage



**Word from the Smokies**  
Frances Figart  
Columnist

The original Fates were a trio of goddesses from Greek mythology whose roles were to spin, measure, and cut the thread of human destiny. Today Asheville has its own modern-day Fates in a harmony-driven acoustic trio of friends who are weaving their environmental values and hopes for a sustainable future into their career choices.

Bella Wells-Fried, Lexi McGraw and Natalie Karrh met at Asheville's Odyssey School in a high school music class taught by world-renowned studio musician and composer River Guerguerian. Now attending various universities, they partnered with me this past summer to create a new music video about the need for wildlife crossings near Great Smoky Mountains National Park. "Safe Passage: Animals Need a Hand" was released on the YouTube channel of Great Smoky Mountains Association on December 10.

Each of The Fates is an accomplished vocalist and has played various musical instruments from a young age. Violinist Bella Wells-Fried grew up in Weaverville and is now studying the intersection of creative writing and music with social and environmental justice at Bennington College in Vermont.

"Ever since I was little, I have been a big empathizer of the natural world," she said. "I started attending Odyssey School in third grade, and I decided to continue my education there because Odyssey has a true focus on cultivating each student as a whole person using the integral method, which I really benefited from."

Bella remembers when she first discovered the uncanny musical compatibility she has with Lexi and Natalie.

"The first time we put a line of harmony together correctly, we were so excited that we completely missed the next line, but we didn't even care," Bella said. "The feeling of satisfaction and connection in that moment was unlike anything I'd ever experienced before. When we finally finished the song and performed it at a school open mic, our mentor and English teacher Gabe Johnson told us that we must form a band. So, we did."

Pianist and bassist Lexi McGraw grew up in Arden and is now attending Guilford College in Greensboro, studying guitar performance with a focus on



The Fates — vocalist and violinist Bella Wells-Fried, vocalist and guitarist Natalie Karrh, and vocalist, pianist, and bassist Lexi McGraw, left to right, — on the set of the video shoot in Flag Pond, Tennessee. PROVIDED BY FRANCES FIGART

education. Throughout high school she learned about music recording and production in an independent study with River Guerguerian and was a music assistant in his classes.

"Working with River has always been an extremely special and rewarding experience," she said. "He has always been quick to provide all of us with any musical opportunities available as well as emotional support."

It was Guerguerian who introduced The Fates to the idea of supporting Safe Passage: The I-40 Pigeon River Gorge Wildlife Crossing Project through recording a song and music video. Safe Passage is a collaborative effort that has been much in the news since November when the North Carolina Department of Transportation announced a wildlife underpass will figure into replacing the Harmon Den bridge on Interstate 40 between Asheville and Knoxville.

"River told me about the project and the amazing people behind it, so naturally we wanted to be a part of it," Lexi

said. "We started out at a piano. River printed out the sheet music for the piece, and we transposed it to a key that would fit our three voices. From there, we brought Natalie and Bella in to add other instruments. We added rhythm guitar, bass, drums, and Bella wrote out a two-part solo on the violin. We refined the melody provided, worked out higher and lower harmonies, and got to practicing."

Guerguerian produced and engineered the song recording, on which he plays hybrid percussion kit. Once the recording was in place, it was time to shoot the music video. In the role of director was Joe Lamirand of Indianapolis, who traveled to Flag Pond, TN, for the production.

"The visual concept of the video was partially inspired by the band's mythological namesakes, The Fates, from their stylized presentation to modern-day hikers symbolizing the animals that have been traveling on the same trails for millennia," said Lamirand. "We see

Lexi, Natalie, and Bella as subtle representations for bear, deer, and elk, following the ancient trails they have always known and struggling to navigate through these huge, loud, scary human-made obstacles, highways that have divided their land and threatened their survival."

Guitarist Natalie Karrh grew up in Boca Raton, Florida, and moved to Asheville at age 15. She is currently studying at Appalachian State University in Boone, majoring in social work and minoring in Spanish.

"Working on the video was a fun and exciting experience," she said. "The first day was spent acting out the storyline of the animals' journeys. The second day entailed the more musical aspect of the video. We were so lucky to have such talented and supportive people working with us the whole time. Joe was a very encouraging and patient director with a clear vision that he helped us all execute. Many other people came out to help, each bringing a sense of joy, community, and dedication."

Each of the Fates said they felt extremely moved and rewarded when they first saw the completed video, which had nearly 3,000 views as this story was being completed.

"The Safe Passage project is a perfect project for our band," said Natalie. "We want our music to be meaningful and create change."

Bella said it is critical to weave holistic thinking into our environmental outlook during these unprecedented times in human history.

"Making sure that we understand the role that we play in the world as a whole, along with every other species, is intrinsic in our goal to reverse the damage that we have done to this planet," she said. "It's been really fulfilling to be involved in this project that is producing concrete results toward that goal."

Find "Safe Passage: Animals Need a Hand" on YouTube. Be sure to watch all four minutes as you won't want to miss the antics of the young black bears during the credits. Support the project at SmokiesSafePassage.org.

Frances Figart is the editor of "Smokies Life" magazine and the Creative Services Director for the 29,000-member Great Smoky Mountains Association, an educational nonprofit partner of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The sheet music for "Safe Passage: Animals Need a Hand" appears in her book "A Search for Safe Passage." Look for it at SmokiesInformation.org and reach the author at frances@gsmassoc.org.

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