

## House concerts: Up close and personal

By JULIE DANIEL Valley Press Staff Writer

Intimate, entertaining, positive, moving and raw. That is how Wayne Slater-Lunsford describes his experiences with house concerts, of which the Lancaster resident has hosted.

"The main thing about house concerts is that it is a dedicated listening environment, it really is about the music," he said. "You're really close to the performer and they are sharing the music in a very personal way."

Slater-Lunsford's next house concert will feature the acoustic and folk duo Stryngs, who will perform from 7 to 9 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 4. Because of the event's non-commercial status, the concert is by invitation only. Call ahead for reservations.

Hailing from the United Kingdom, Stryngs guitarist Martin Giles said the group used to perform at pubs and clubs but found house concerts more engaging.

"We've pretty much been won over to house concerts now," Giles wrote in a recent e-mail interview. "We've played at all sorts of venues in the UK ... but poor PA systems, the noise and lack of intimacy at most venues make it particularly hard to communicate our music properly."

Lyricist and vocalist Strings added: "There's something really cozy and friendly about house concerts; by the end of the evening, you've made friends rather than fans."

The band began in 2000 after Giles and bassist Chris Marshall met vocalist Strings at a club in west London. They were at a get-together for fans of singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell.

In the beginning, the group played covers of Mitchell's tunes before writing their own music a few months later.

"As much as it's great covering other people's songs, it can feel a lot like karaoke," Strings wrote. "You play and sing your own songs and you're taking something entirely new out there and whether people like it or not, it's yours."

The band consists of five members; however, only two members, Giles and Strings, are touring the U.S. The duo will perform original tunes such as "Frank's Song," "Middle England Cross" and "Run MyPenDry."

"Lyrics-wise, I think 'Run My Pen Dry' is my favorite," Strings said. "It's based on how I tend to write a lot of ... poetry when I fall for someone, and the line is, 'I would run my pen dry over you if you let me.'"

Like many other international bands, Stryngs traveled to the U.S. because of its diverse tastes in music.

"You can turn on the radio here and hear anything, from bluegrass to hip-hop to country to rap," Strings said. "The fact that America already has a really active house concert circuit and a huge audience for folk and singer-songwriters is testimony to its open-minded approach to music."

Traveling bands and hosts of house concerts find each other mainly through Web sites that list house concerts, including [www.concertsinyourhome.com](http://www.concertsinyourhome.com), [www.houseconcerts.us](http://www.houseconcerts.us), [www.myspace.com/russjuliehouseconcerts](http://www.myspace.com/russjuliehouseconcerts) and [www.joanenguita.com](http://www.joanenguita.com)

"It's a great resource that connects performers with people who want to host house concerts," Giles said.

House concerts are not about money.

"For us, this is about a great experience," Giles said. "We're meeting lots of lovely people, experiencing some great music ... and we're getting to see some fabulous country and lots of famous U.S. cities that we've only seen in films up to now."

There is no cover charge for the Stryngs event. However, the group -like many other traveling bands- partially depend on donations to get them from one concert to the next. For more details about the concert, call (661) 339-2655 or visit [www.desertsongfest.org](http://www.desertsongfest.org). For more information about Stryngs, visit [www.myspace.com/stryngs](http://www.myspace.com/stryngs).



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