

Eric Danton | *Hartford Courant* | October, 2002 | Hartford, CT

MUSIC

Twins like their style of success

By ERIC R. DANTON
COURANT ROCK CRITIC

It's difficult to define true success in the music business. Is it money? Fame? Radio airplay?

Sure, for Lenny Kravitz or Britney Spears, who sell gazillions of albums and show up in more TV commercials than music videos.

Meredith Thompson and her twin sister, Chris, have a different idea of what makes a musician successful. The sisters have released five independent folk albums since 1996, including this year's "Clearwater," and have toured

to build a fan base of people who love their ghostly vocal harmonies, poignant lyrics and world music textures.

While Meredith Thompson wouldn't turn down the trappings of traditional success, she says the Thompson sisters aren't seeking them, either.

"There are only a very, very few performers who can be superstars. But there are a ton of smaller networks you can tap into," she said by phone from her home in Boston, where the sisters were preparing for a CD release performance Saturday in Granby. "I think that success can be determined just by having performances that people attend and enjoy the music and you can communicate with people on a certain level; that is the way I feel successful as a musician."

"Clearwater" alone is enough to define the duo as a success. The dozen tunes on the album are beautifully arranged folk songs, full of acoustic guitar, flute and elements of world music percussion. The Thompsons wrote 10 of the songs and included covers of "Amazing Grace" and Dave Carter's "Tanglewood Tree." (The album is available online at www.cmthompson.com.)

Carter, who died of a heart attack in July, the night before he was scheduled to perform at the Green River Festival in Massachusetts, was a big influence on the Thompsons, as he was on many folk artists.

"He was such a good guy. Everybody was very sad that that happened," Thompson said. "We planned to get together and then

one thing after another happened and we said, 'OK, we'll see you at Falcon Ridge [an annual folk festival in New York that happens the weekend after Green River].'

And we didn't. It really makes you think, you know."

The sisters' version of "Tanglewood Tree" is a fitting tribute to Carter,

and the song, like the rest of the album, features performances by some of the usual suspects in the New England folk scene. Guitarists Duke Levine (Jonatha Brooke, Mark Erelli) and Jim Henry (Cliff Eberhardt, Erelli), drummer Doug Plavin (Bill Morrissey), bassist Richard Gates (Morrissey) and organist Seth Farber (Eberhardt) all lend their considerable talents to "Clearwater."

"It's neat. There's a community of musicians as well as a community of listeners, and there's a community of radio stations, too," Thompson said.

The sisters are New England natives and grew up in Providence, where they played their first gig at the folk club Stone Soup. After attending Cornell, the Thompsons lived with their parents in Pittsburgh and began touring, driving themselves around the country to perform at coffeehouses and folk clubs.

"For 2½ years we toured around the country doing it full-time," Thompson said. "I think we did 300 shows a year at one point, and some of them weren't that great. It was baptism by fire, but I think it was an experience I needed to have."

When their parents moved to Simsbury, the sisters moved with them and stayed in the Hartford

area for about 18 months before moving to Boston.

"There are a lot of neat coffeehouses in the area. We really, really felt that Hartford was a supportive community, but we felt that we wanted to move here," Thompson said.

Though "Clearwater" actually came out over the summer, the sisters' performance Saturday is their first in the area since the album's release.

"We haven't gotten back to Hartford and Providence, which are two of our favorite places to play," Thompson said.

Chris and Meredith Thompson perform Saturday at Pilgrim Covenant Church, 605 Salmon Brook St., Granby. Lisa Lawrence of West Hartford opens. Tickets for the 8 p.m. show are \$12 in advance, \$15 at the door. Information: 860-653-3800.



CHRIS AND MEREDITH THOMPSON perform their folk music Saturday at Pilgrim Covenant Church in Granby.