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The Quebe Sisters Band played their CD release show at Threadgill's on Saturday night.

Fiddle-playing trio stops in Austin

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The best way to describe the Quebe Sisters Band's rise from a local event in Fort Worth to a well-polished, road-tested five-piece band is organic. Since their first gig in 2000, they've added musical layers, recorded two CDs and landed on both coasts, Canada, and all around Texas.

This weekend, they found themselves temporarily nested here in Austin with radio appearances on KVET on Thursday morning and on KUT on Saturday at noon, two gigs in "A Ride with Bob" at the Paramount with Austin's Asleep at the Wheel, and a CD release at Threadgill's on Saturday evening.

Their story is quite charming: three young sisters, Grace, Sophia and Hulda, see award-winning Texas fiddle players Joey and Sherry McKenzie at a competition and decide they want to play fiddle just like the McKenzies.

The fiddlers run a studio, but their teaching schedule is booked up.

Mom is persistent and eventually gets them onto the schedule and the three sisters begin lessons together, learning Texas fiddling techniques and western swing.

Their talent and dedication is immediately apparent, all three winning state and national championships.

The McKenzies nurture the sisters' musical growth by exposing them to numerous CDs and LPs from their vast collection of old-time and contemporary music.

Their first foray into three-part fiddle playing began with none other than Bob Willis' classic "Faded Love."

One day, the fiddle teacher gets a call to provide some music at an event and decides that the sisters are a perfect fit, and since that first outing, the phone just keeps ringing.

They begin to formally rehearse, to build up a repertoire, a tour and a record, to make a name for themselves, and to take up singing three-part vocal harmony along the way.

Seven years, countless shows and a couple of albums later, their performance resume includes New York's Carnegie Hall and the Philadelphia Folk Festival, the country's oldest active folk festival.

Everything for the band has been done in-house. From Bob Willis' songs to Duke Ellington standards to fiery breakdown fiddle tunes, all of the fiddle and vocal arrangements are done by teacher and guitar

player Joey McKenzie. McKenzie also put down his fiddle to accompany the sisters on guitar, a necessary accoutrement of old-time swing style.

All of their bookings and summer tours have been done by Sherry McKenzie, a role that she learned on the job.

Their latest album was released on their own record label, Fiddle-tone records, despite solid offers from established record labels.

"We just wanted to establish our own sound and our own direction," says McKenzie. Part of this was the addition of ace North Texas bassist Drew Phelps.

The band's independent mindset comes through clearest in the varied selection of songs on their latest release, *Timeless*, which includes songs ranging from jazz standards to country gospel, from fiddle tunes to cowboy tunes.

Despite the varied repertoire, the constants on the album are impeccable musicianship, precise three-part harmony and a dedication to carry on a great tradition of Texas fiddling. According to McKenzie, "So far, we're just having a blast."

"We recorded the CD as an accurate representation of the band now, like one of our shows," remarked Grace Quebe about recording both of their albums and anything in the future.

No bells and whistles, no added musicians or overdubs and no digital recording, *Timeless* was recorded analog at the Cash Cabin Studio on Johnny Cash's estate in Tennessee.

"It was a wonderful atmosphere for recording, very comfortable," reminisced McKenzie. "When you finish recording, you step out the door and there's deer out there and all kinds of critters."

When the Quebe Sisters Band hit the stage at Threadgill's, fans were transported into the utopic past of up-beat tempos, beautiful harmony and huge helpings of Texas fiddling.

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