

"The woods always smell of sweet magnolia on the place where I was born and raised. It's the poet land of Faulkner and Eudora. It's my Mississippi home I'm travelin' for."

"Mississippi Home" by the NYCity Slickers

Annie Chadwick

AND THE

NYCITY SLICKERS

BY JUDY SMITH

Writer Thomas Wolfe once wrote, "You can't go home again," but he didn't know Jackson native Annie Chadwick and her musical partner in life both on and off the stage, Faser Hardin of Macon. This month, they are proving just how wrong that statement is as they return to the home of their roots, bringing their "Mississippi Home" tour to family and friends as they promote the debut album, "Layin' It Down," of their band the NYCity Slickers. But don't let the name throw you off. Their sound is pure and sweet with a hint of the Big Apple blended into their Southern souls.

Annie, Faser, and their daughter, Abigail Hardin, and a host of talented musicians and singers will bring their new songs to their Southern homeland, making stops at the Millsaps Arts and Lectures Series, Hal and Mal's, and First United Methodist

Church of Canton as well as other gigs throughout the state in October.

Even though Chadwick and Faser have spent the majority of their adult lives above the Mason Dixon Line, they have never forgotten their Mississippi roots. Both come from farming families, and both grew up in homes filled with music.

Annie was born and raised in Jackson in a close-knit family that was brought together by their love of animals and music. Annie's father, Vernon Chadwick, state veterinarian for more than 25 years, and her mother, Glenn Hines Chadwick, always encouraged their children to follow their dreams.

"My parents thought it was important for us to learn to play the piano, and anytime we had family or company at the house, they would always encourage us to play for them or sing," Annie said.

That is when Annie's musical career began to take roots. Annie and her two sisters, Dorothy Chadwick and Pat Lamar, and her brother, Vernon Chadwick Jr., grew up singing in the church choir, and the Chadwick children were blessed with wonderful imaginations and creative spirits. The siblings would make up shows and perform them in their backyard. This, along with her singing voice and tight harmonies with her sisters and a neighborhood

friend that sparked her career.

The Chadwick family lived across the street from WLBT weatherman Woodie Assaf and his family. Assaf suggested that the girls form a group. The all-girl band, the Petticoat Minstrels, was born. At the age of 14, Annie began playing washtub bass and singing in the folk band.

"That was such a marvelous experience. Woodie was a wonderful influence on me. He would set up shows for us, drive us around to all of our gigs. Looking back now, he was really my first agent."

From those humble beginnings, Annie's career began to blossom. She studied classical music at Millsaps College. It was there that she met Faser Hardin, her musical soul mate. Faser, born in Macon to a musical family, has memories of his father, who dreamed of being a drummer, tapping away at the drums on the snare and hi-hat as they listened to records. Faser also began taking piano lessons and continued studying throughout his high school years, winning numerous state piano competitions. While at Millsaps, he studied the organ.

Throughout their early careers, the couple performed in the Jackson area, including New Stage Theatre and the Mississippi Opera. After graduation they continued their studies at Indiana University where Annie received a master's degree in opera stage direction and voice, and Faser received a master's degree in organ performance and church music.

With big dreams they made their way to the Big Apple. It wasn't long before they were met with



Faser Hardin, Annie Chadwick, Abigail Hardin, Ann Kazery, Dorothy Chadwick



Petticoat Minstrels



The Troubadours, Millsaps College



Faser, Abigail and Annie with Ralph Stanley

success in the New York theater circuit. The couple had a friend, Clif Dowell from Gulport, who owned a theater in the big city. He promised the couple that they could stay in a loft apartment that he owned for free if they would help him out at the theater.

Annie met with quick success on the stage, winning roles on the New York stage, in television and movies. She has appeared in "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," "Cabaret," "Chicago," "Hello Dolly," "Law and Order," "SVU," "Another World," "Guiding Light," "Confessions of a Shopaholic," and others.

Amid the cityscape of Manhattan, Annie and Faser welcomed their daughter, Abigail Hardin, to the world and the entertainment industry. This brown-eyed beauty with a mighty voice has already built up an impressive resume, appearing on the New York stage and winning roles in television and film productions as well as lending her voice to the NYCity Slickers.

"I've been singing since the age of four," Abigail said. "Growing up with theatrical parents in NYC, I really didn't have any other choice. I was surrounded by theatre and music from the moment I could sit semi-still, and I just fell in love with it."

"My parents' genuine love for Mississippi has definitely been instilled in me," Abigail said. "The pure kindness, hospitality, and grace that I've experienced in Mississippi is unequalled anywhere else. There is so much beauty in Mississippi, and it's a place that I take pride in."

It was on a road trip home that the NYCity Slickers was born. While Abigail was away at Emerson College studying musical theatre, Annie and Faser were traveling through Virginia to New York, listening to various stations. Amid the static on the radio waves, there was a unique and beautiful sound that caught their ear and attention - bluegrass.

"I kind of looked at Faser, and we just realized how much we were loving this music," Annie said. "This was a different type of music than what we were accustomed to performing. We didn't grow up singing or listening to a lot of bluegrass, but we knew that this was something that we wanted to

try. We decided to take this true American sound and go with it, and we have just been enamored with it ever since."

When the couple returned to New York, they started putting together a bluegrass band and asked their daughter if she would like to join the group. Annie knew Abigail was hesitant to sing with her parents, so she and Faser began working with other musicians on this new venture. "After Abi heard what we were doing, she told us that she really liked the sound and wanted to join the band," Annie said. "Abi and I had always sung duets in church and blended well together. When she joined, it was a magical moment. We started adding more talented musicians and another gal singer to give us three-part tight harmony, and basically the NYCity Slickers was born."

The group includes Annie, Abigail, and Kim Harris harmonizing; Faser on banjo and accordion; Andrew Baird, guitarist; Doug Drewes on bass; Jens Kramer on fiddle; and Greg Utzig on mandolin. The sound is best described as bluegrass - Big Apple style.

They have brought their special blend of eclectic stylings, Delta blues, and Bluegrass pop to their debut CD, "Layin' It Down," which features 13 tracks including eight original tunes, several of

which were penned by the songwriting talents of their Mississippi family - brother, Vernon, and brother-in-law, Reeves Jones. During the Mississippi Picnic in Central Park in June, the NYCity Slickers announced their "Mississippi Home" tour which would make at least eight stops.

Annie is hoping that her Aunt Ann Kazery, the accomplished pianist for whom she is named, will join her on stage for a special performance at the Millsaps Arts and Lecture Series, as well as a host of other talented family members, including brother-in-law Reeves

"Millsaps is always proud of our alums who do well, and it's very special to have the group want to return to the hallowed halls of their alma mater on their first Southern tour," said Nola Gibson, director of continuing education at Millsaps.

For Annie, this is a special homecoming of sorts for her, not only to embrace dear family and friends in her homeland, but it also brings her back to where it all began. "I feel like my career has come full circle," Annie said. "I was always performing in school plays and the theater all my life, but it really all started with singing. Plus, Mississippi and Jackson will always be where my heart is. That is the beginning of our story, and it's nice to come home."



Faser Hardin, Doug Drewes, Jens Kramer, Annie Chadwick, Kim Harris, Abigail Hardin, Greg Utzig, Andrew Baird