

THE WINTERLINGS

Winterlings.com

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Wolff Bowden grew up in a house on concrete stilts, fifteen feet above a Florida swamp. Summer nights brought symphonies of alligators, owls and frogs. But in Wolff's recurring dream, it was always winter, and he walked out among the cypresses to sit by a blazing fire where he would sing to a strange collection of forest beings he called The Winterlings.

Amanda Birdsall was working on a doctorate in psychology, halfway through an Adult Psychopathology class, when she looked down at her notebook. Instead of transcribing the lecture, she had completely filled the margins with song lyrics. She stood up, walked out of class, grabbed her guitar and drove to Canada where she worked on organic farms in exchange for food and tiny rooms where she wrote songs by candlelight.

Since childhood, Wolff had been painting his dreams of otherworldly beings, skeletons on bicycles and winged women. He painted secretly from grade school to college, shot some slides, and was named Artist of the Millennium by ARTEXPO MIAMI. At the show, Wolff sold his first painting to baseball legend Andre Dawson for \$5,000. After that, he traveled the country making and selling art. The art sales bought Wolff time to write. He published two books of poetry, including thirty-six poems that appeared in literary magazines. But for Wolff, something was still missing. A deep wish remained unfulfilled. He had turned paint into money into time into poetry, but like an alchemist who had turned steel to silver, he knew there was another step. How could he turn bright canvases and poetry to music? He needed a way to paint the wind itself, to extract color from silence and distill it into song. But he had never learned an instrument. He couldn't play a single chord.

Meanwhile, Amanda roamed. Camping in the Rocky Mountains of Montana, bagging dried fruit in a Canadian nut factory, and cultivating collards in North Carolina gradually led her south to Florida, where she fought for abused children as a social worker. But the job was heartrending, so she left to clean houses for a year until exhaustion and the cost of rent drove her into the air-conditioned corporate world. Her guitar went under the bed in the coffin of its case, and like any good ghost, it haunted her.

Wolff and Amanda met one night at a party where a Buddhist ritual had just taken place in a backyard fire pit. The ritual consisted of writing, on small slips of paper, wishes that would burn in the flames so their smoke might lift them into the wind and make them real. Wolff burned his wish and Amanda arrived an hour later. She was the muse and the music he had been waiting for, and his life as an artist re-awakened her desire for a creative life.

Wolff and Amanda sold their cars on Ebay, bought a banged-up van from a motorcycle shop, and drove to Oregon where they knew no one. They rented a small apartment next to a large forest and wrote the songs for their first album: *On The Night You Were Born*. This album, released under the name of The Orphan Trains, supported a second trip to Oregon where Amanda and Wolff slipped into a blue cocoon, wrote their new album, *THE ANIMAL GROOM*, and became The Winterlings.