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The country rock band Parmalee performs at the Cedar County Fair in Hartington, Nebraska, Saturday night. (Courtesy photo)

Party Fever

Parmalee, Swon Brothers Headline At Cedar County Fair

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This weekend's entertainment at the Cedar County Fair in Hartington, Nebraska, is going to be a party, hosted by up-and-coming country performers, Parmalee and The Swon Brothers.

Parmalee and The Swon Brothers will rock the Cedar County Fair grandstands at 8:30 p.m. Saturday and 8 p.m. Sunday, respectively.

Parmalee's lead vocalist and guitarist Matt Thomas said the band is excited to return to Nebraska, promising a rockin' show during their approximately hour and a half long performance.

"We're gonna have a good time," Thomas said in a phone interview earlier this week with the *Press & Dakotan*. "It's all about the party."

Helping Matt host Saturday's party are brother Scott Thomas on drums, cousin Barry Knox on bass and guitarist Josh McSwain, a longtime family friend.

Not surprisingly, the group's first hit single on its 2013 album "Feels like Carolina," portrayed what the band is all about — providing a party. The party rock single, "Musta Had a Good Time," highlights the aftermath of a party the night before.

And the hits did not stop there. "Close Your Eyes" and "Already Callin' You Mine" have been climbing the charts. "Carolina" was named the longest climbing single by a duo or group in the 24-year history of the Billboard country Airplay Chart and reached Gold status (over 500,000 copies sold).

"We always imagined this is where we wanted to be," Matt said. "We didn't know how we were going to get (here) or how it was going to happen, but (we) definitely had that in the top of our mind — to get where we are now or bigger."

But Parmalee's road to stardom was no easy feat. There were a lot of speedbumps along the way.

"It's been a lot of ups and down for us," Matt said. "We've been through several 'almost, gonna get it' moments where we thought record deals were going to happen that never did or several investors fell through."

But those moments were incomparable to the incident that left one of the band members fighting for his life.

After a show in 2010, the band was the victim of an attempted robbery in which shots were fired, hitting drummer Scott Thomas three times. He was transported to a Charlotte hospital, where he was given a 5 percent chance of survival. He spent 10 days in a coma and 35 total days in the hospital. Five months later, he had recovered enough to get behind the drum kit.

"(After the shooting), we got a little tighter, more focused and appreciative and probably a little more hard headed," Matt said.

Matt and his brother Scott grew up near Greenville, North Carolina, watching their father's band perform, before eventually joining themselves. Knox had been playing drums for his church choir when he decided to join his cousins. In 2001, the three took their group to college, when they met McSwain, adding the final member and thus beginning Parmalee.

The band practiced every Tuesday and Thursday in a small tin roof barn in Parmelee, North Carolina. The group added the extra 'e' to make pronunciation of their name easier.

The group has been able to balance a professional career and being a family.

"(We're) working towards the same goal," Matt said. "It is a job, but you try to understand that everybody has to support families and you kind of work around it, but a



The Swon Brothers headline the Cedar County Fair Sunday night. (Courtesy photo)

lot of people own a family business together."

The four draw inspiration and are fans of Foo Fighters, the Zac Brown Band, Kenny Chesney and their favorite, the Allman Brothers Band.

While the group is primarily country rock, it also blends its background and appreciation in blues, soul, bluegrass, traditional country and southern rock.

Having fans remark how the band's songs connect to them is one of the most rewarding aspects of being a musician, according to Matt.

"... We just want to make everyone smile and have a good time," he said. "I think that moment when you're singin' and the whole crowd is singing every word back to you is pretty cool — it's hard to beat that."

More recent to the country music limelight is the duo The Swon Brothers, who were discovered on the NBC hit television show "The Voice."

Oklahoma natives Zach and Colton Swon were raised on music, and by the ages of 12 and 9, they knew they wanted to combine their talents and create a brother duo.

"We really haven't known any other way," Zach said in a phone interview with the *Press & Dakotan*. "Even before we decided to do it as a career, we just did it because that's what we did at our house as kids. We've literally been going back and forth to Nashville since (we were kids)."

With hopes of furthering their career, the brothers auditioned for "The Voice" in 2013. In the fourth season of the show, the duo gained an ally and mentor with country sensation Blake Shelton and competed on his team, Team Blake.

"('The Voice') was definitely a journey," Zach said. "It was a boot camp for everything we're experiencing now. It got us ready for fast-paced schedules and taught us what hard work was ... The show as a whole was definitely what we needed to get out there and gain a lot of fans that there's no way we could have reached without that."

Their appearance on the show may not have resulted

in a win, but record labels had their eyes fixated on them, offering deals after the conclusion of the season.

Since the show, the Swon Brothers signed a record deal with Arista Nashville and began compiling songs for their self-titled album, which released in 2014.

To date, the duo has received their first CMA award nomination for "Vocal Duo of the Year," thanks to their most popular single, "Later On."

The brothers are living their dream, and sometimes, it still seems just that.

"It's more like you dream about it, and it's really hard to imagine," Colton said. "You can daydream all you want and we still, to be honest, don't realize until after the moment what is actually happening."

Being family while juggling a professional career may be a balancing act, but the Swon Brothers do so with their lighthearted nature, as Wednesday's interview full of brotherly banter proved.

"I am (the oldest)," Zach said. "Older, wiser, better looking and more talented."

All joking aside, being family first and foremost is something the brothers don't want to lose sight of, they said.

"To be honest, we have our brother fights on and off the road, but we're still brothers," Colton said. "... We've always said: 'Brothers come first — before career, before anything, and if the (career) ever gets in the way of (brotherhood), we'll hang it up! That's what's most important in life to us, family.'"

The Jason Earl Band will play prior to Parmalee's 8:30 p.m. performance, beginning at approximately 7 p.m. Saturday and then after in the beer garden. Hartington native Bridget Kruse will open for the Swon Brothers' 8 p.m. show at approximately 7 p.m. Sunday in the grandstands.

Tickets will be available for purchase at the gate.

For further information and schedules of the weekend fair events, visit www.cedarcountyfair.net.

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