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Wyoming's new state song, 'Wyoming Where I Belong,' celebrates twins' love of home state

Elysia Conner 307-266-0509, Elysia.Conner@trib.com May 17, 2019

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Then-Gov. Matt Mead signs a law in July making Annie and Amy Smith's "Wyoming Where I Belong" Wyoming's new state song. Photo by Elysia Conner. Contributed

The music flows to lyrics that span Wyoming's landscapes in a song that speaks of wind across the Western plains, mountains and rivers, with names that have captured hearts and imaginations around the world.

“The Black Hills rise, over Thunder Basin, the Sweetwater runs across the Great Divide/The Wind Rivers sweep into the North Platte Valley,” goes the song.

“Wyoming Where I Belong,” by fifth-generation Wyoming native twins Amy and Annie Smith, was voted by the Wyoming State Legislature to become a second state song last July.

The sisters, known as the duo Annie & Amy, wrote the song about 19 years ago and have performed it around the world.

“The pride we feel for Wyoming,” Annie wrote in an email, “we hope instills in other people pride for their homeland.”

The sisters debuted “Wyoming Where I Belong” in Central Park during a large event with stars like Don Henley and Treat Williams, they recalled, and made “Good Morning America” the next day.

The twins at the time were signed with Warner Brothers and performed the song on one of their tours around the world. BBC Radio picked up the song, and it received play across Europe, they said. They've performed the song from their hometown to Europe and Argentina to Australia, and it received an international music award for American Culture and Heritage, according to the song's website.

"Wherever we went, people just loved this song," Annie said.

They wrote the song at a time of healing, Amy said. They'd returned to Wyoming for a few years after touring, working in the music business and living in different cities and countries.

"'Wyoming Where I Belong' was in our souls at the time," Amy typed in a text message.

The song has caught more attention in Wyoming in the past five years after Wyoming PBS created a video featuring aerial footage over landscapes across the state, they said. It took off on social media and has been performed by the Cheyenne Symphony Orchestra. The twins have performed it for special events around the state, including in the Capitol building before its renovation at the invitation of then-Rep. Rosie Berger. The song also has been performed by the Cheyenne All-City Children's Chorus, who also helped the duo present it to the Wyoming Legislature.

People around Wyoming requested that "Wyoming Where I Belong" become the state song, according to a press release.

"We're so thrilled that people thought this could be a state song of Wyoming, and we were just honored with that," Annie said.

The song doesn't replace the original Wyoming state song, which was adopted in 1955 composed by G.E. Knapp with lyrics by C.E. Winter, according to the state's website. The twins see their song as a complement to the original about Wyoming becoming a new state.

State Rep. Dan Zwonitzer introduced the bill in the 2018 legislative session, and it was signed into law that July. About half of the states have multiple songs, and Wyoming hadn't chosen another since its first state song decades before, he said. The bill passed quickly and easily in honor of the work of two Wyoming natives who voice their love for Wyoming wherever they go, he said. The sisters gave ownership of the song to the Wyoming Department of Tourism.

“Wyoming Where I Belong” includes lyrics about the Absarokas, the Big Horns, the Snowy Range and the North Platte River and other places they know.

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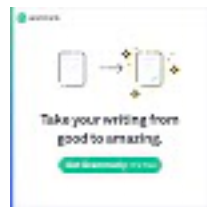
The sisters have been surprised how the song speaks of home to those who'd never been to Wyoming, like a radio personality in Romania who once asked them to send him the song.

“It wasn't about Wyoming for them; it was universal,” Amy said.

“It was about the beauty of places,” Annie added.

Besides chorale and symphony arrangements, the song is being translated for marching bands, they said.

“It's really out of our hands anymore,” according to Amy. “It's just taken on its own entity, its own journey I'd say.”

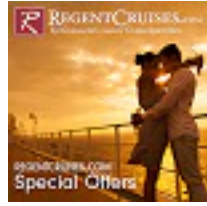


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The sisters helped write the “Cheyenne Anthem” for the city’s 150th anniversary in 2017, according to their bio. They hail from Cheyenne, where both sides of their family homesteaded in the Wyoming Territory and have been influential through the generations through their work, businesses and efforts in organizations.

The twins competed on “The Gong Show” when they were young teenagers and wound up winning with their performance of Leroy Van Dyke’s “The Auctioneer.” In high school, they performed on USO Tours worldwide and at the Grand Ole Opry before attending Stanford.

They’ve performed many concerts with country stars and recalled sharing stories backstage at the WYO Theater with Garth Brooks and Chris LeDoux.

They have been featured on 60 Minutes and multiple commercials and have sung for four U.S. presidents. When they performed for Ronald Reagan after his presidency, they met actor Jimmy Stewart and a former ambassador to the Vatican who became a close friend and later visited Wyoming.

“I’ve never met people like you and I want to see where you came from,” he’d told them.

The ambassador’s welcome included a meeting with the governor, and they served as the grand marshal of the parade in Cheyenne, they said.

They returned from Los Angeles to Wyoming about five years ago to help their parents, Amy said. Annie now lives in Nashville and Amy remained in Cheyenne. They travel between Wyoming and Nashville as they continue to write and record.

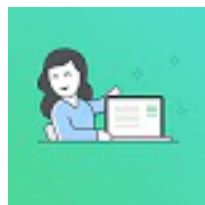
Both their parents had a chance to see their song go through the Legislature. During the process, their father — a former lawmaker, World War II veteran and P-51 single-engine fighter pilot — earned cheers of his own when he stood and introduced himself to the Legislature.

Life is the little moments that make up the big moments, Amy said. Their mother, who died in February, used to tell them, “At the table sits sorrow and joy.”

“But then you can appreciate it more, and that’s what Amy and I do,” Annie said. “We appreciate it so much being away from our home state and coming back, big difference.”

“Big difference,” Amy agreed.

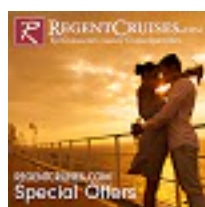
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'Wyoming Where I Belong'

For more about Annie & Amy and "Wyoming Where I Belong," go to amyannie.com and wyomingwhereibelong.com.

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