



When they decided to move out of the living room and perform at small coffee shops and bars in the Twin City area, they decided to look to both their home and their ancestors for a name.

"We all had grandparents that said some version of 'pert near,' 'put near,' and they all mean 'pretty close.' Sandstone is an abstract reference to the Mississippi River," Kniebel says.

From there, newly named Pert' Near Sandstone formed and grew naturally, with each member shaping and molding the band's sound over time. After about a year, they added a bassist, currently Justin Bruhn, which rounded out the band's sound and made it "easier for the audience to dance," Kniebel says.

After two years, Andy Lambert brought with him a pair of clogging shoes, the equipment of a percussive, centuries old form of dancing where the dancer taps and pounds out a rhythm with their feet, resembling something of a human limberjack doll on stage.

"It's in our blood," Kniebel says. "It's an organic artifact of the upbringing that we've all experienced. In the Midwest, we don't have a lot of months that are warm and you can hangout outside. You've got to make the best of the nights out that you have and really party hard, dance hard. You've got one chance at it, then you are going to be locked up in the cold for the next three or four days. You have to make your own fire."

And audiences across the nation have received their Midwestern work ethic and their timeless type of music with open arms in this too-busy, technologically-tethered world.

"We are all just playing acoustic music, there's nothing funny going on up there," Kniebel

says. "They're moved because we really believe in what we're doing; it exudes from us the passion for this art form that we've created. It's one of the few things these days that you don't need a laptop to enjoy."

Their energy is what first brought the band to Mike Pengra's attention, the program director of "Radio Heartland" at Minnesota Public Radio. The band's first album, *Live-Just Outside of Sandstone*, landed on his desk and he "knew right away that the band had a lot of energy." His favorite memory is of a performance at the Minnesota State Fair in 2008, when he rode in the band's tour bus to the stage at 5 a.m. By 6:45 a.m., the band was awake and roaring, playing throughout the entirety of the three hour radio show.

"Any band that can do that, any band that can come off the road for several days and drive and play at 6:30 a.m. ...They nailed it," Pengra says.

In a visual bow to their heritage, the cover of *The Hardest Part of Leaving* features lithographs from the 1890s of both of the Twin Cities: Minneapolis on the front, St. Paul on the back. Towards the bottom of the Minneapolis etching, beneath the then railroad-toting Stone Arch Bridge, runs the Mississippi River in after-storm sky blue.

For Kniebel, the constantly flowing water represents the larger, eternal passing of traditional music and culture from stage to crowd, and ultimately, from person to person.

"When I think about the tradition, and where it all came from, in my mind's eye I'm always kind of feeling like it's a part of this river that's been flowing forever that we just happen to be flowing down as well."