

Showing up!

Bonnie Bishop is blasting the music charts everywhere with her new single, "Ain't What I Was."

by Jan Sikes

THese days, Bonnie Bishop is doing a whole lot more than just showing up. She is blasting the music charts everywhere with her new single, "Ain't What I Was."

If you haven't heard the story already, Bonnie quit the road and walked away from the music business after many years. She reached the end of her rope, so to speak, when she suffered a panic attack two weeks before her thirty-fifth birthday, which landed her in a Nashville ER.

"Something just snapped. I felt like I was losing my mind," Bonnie recalls. Doctors recommended that she take some time off.

Defeated, she packed up her apartment and headed home to her parents in Wimberly.

Bonnie spent three months crying and feeling sorry for herself. Then she decided to pursue her true passion ... storytelling. She had a multitude of stories from the road and began channeling her energy into writing them. She applied to and was accepted into Sewanee's prestigious MFA Creative Writing program at Sewanee University of the South.

And, that is where she was when Thirty Tigers co-founder, David Macias, called and told her that David Cobb was interested in producing a record on her.

I had to ask Bonnie what her thoughts were when she received that call.

"I was obviously skeptical. After fourteen years in the business, I knew there were always ideas and pipe dreams that kinda' suck you down these rabbit holes and I had decided there was no destiny in any of this. It was all just something I'd imagined and chased after for so long and needed to let it go. So my initial reaction was that this would be another one of those scenes to

suck me back in and disappoint me."

But, she took the gamble and flew to Nashville for lunch with David Cobb, Grammy-award winning producer of artists such as Chris Stapleton, Jason Isbell and Sturgill Simpson.

Bonnie continues her story. "I felt very intimidated because I'd been out of it. I hadn't been singing or writing songs. So, I'd say I was really skeptical but when we sat down for lunch and he told he was making an album on Chris Stapleton it gave me a reason to pause ... Because, Chris Stapleton was one of those unknown stars in Nashville for years. He was the guy everybody always said if there was any justice in country music Chris Stapleton would be a star. People used to say that all the time."

Obviously, Chris found his niche with Dave Cobb since he walked away with multi-awards this year from the big heads in Nashville.

The fact that Dave Cobb was in the studio at the time with Chris, helped Bonnie make her decision to try it. Then, Dave told Bonnie, "I don't think you're a country singer. I think you're a soul singer."

So, as skeptical as she was, when she heard that, it opened her mind to a possibility that hadn't been there before. "Making another run at what I've been trying to do already for so many years felt like a lost cause. But, here was somebody who wanted to do something different from what I'd ever done and it made me think that it might be a new road that could open and that maybe things might turn out differently."



Catch her at the Ranch Bash at Panther Island Pavilion October 22: Bonnie Bishop

We never know in life, the reasons for things and how they fall into place, but for Bonnie, this changed her entire direction.

Bonnie explained. "We don't know what the path is. We don't know what God's plan is for our lives and we think we do. As a believer, I would think, 'oh, God gave me this gift for this reason and this other gift for another reason.' But, that's one of the things I learned on the journey is that it's really all about developing character and becoming the person I was meant to be. God cares a lot more about developing character than he does about me getting to all of the places I ever dreamed of being. If he'd given me any of those dreams, I would have self-destructed because I wasn't ready to receive them."

The songs

I ASKED BONNIE HOW LONG it took to record this album *Ain't Who I Was*, once they got into the studio and her answer shocked me. "We recorded all of the songs in a week and then mixed for a couple of days. All-in-all, the whole record was done in ten days."

Wow! That's an extremely short amount of time to do an entire album. "That's the way Dave Cobb works," Bonnie explained. "He works very fast. He's in the moment. He doesn't listen to the songs in advance at all."

That too, amazed me. It also

distinguishes Dave Cobb as the amazing producer he is.

"We went into the studio on August 1st last year with Jimmy Wallace on keyboards, Chris Powell on drums, Brian Allen on bass, Leroy Powell on electric guitar and Dave Cobb on acoustic. I had thirty-six songs on a list because I didn't really know what we were going to record or what it was going to sound like. I only knew that Dave was going to make a soul record on me, so I just brought him songs that I loved ... songs that I'd written ... songs that other people had written and mostly things from my older catalog that I'd never recorded."

As it turns out, Dave Cobb also has a unique way of choosing songs to record and his method of recording them.

Bonnie broke it down. "I started playing him songs off that list and he would get a smile and say, 'oh, yeah, I like that one. Let's work on that.' He would literally spend about five minutes in the studio by himself and create an arrangement. Then he called the whole band in and pushed record and we recorded. And then it was on to the next song. It was very fast, spontaneous and terrifying for me. I had to simply trust him."

The first track on this album, "Mercy" was written by Bishop. It tells a story of a woman completely addicted to a man. "I never thought I'd live to see the day/When I'd be running after a man

this way ... Have a little mercy on me, baby."

The next song, "Be With You" is written by Chris Stapleton and Tim Kregel. Raw emotion and longing seep through the words of this song. "All I ever wanted is to be with you."

"Looking for You" written by Bishop and Ben Danaher picks up the tempo but the words keep the raw truth you'll find on every song on this album; "I had to fall to see the truth."

And because you'll find a bit of everything on this CD, there is an old spiritual that Bonnie pours her entire soul into. "I Done Died" is reminiscent of Bonnie Raitt (who has recorded more than one of Bishop's songs.) "I done died/Ain't gonna die no more/Ain't that good news?"

Jimmy Wallace, Bishop's longtime friend and co-writer, collaborated with her on several songs on this album. "Poor Man's Melody" is one that haunts long after the last note dies out. "When I have nowhere left to hide/This world has stripped me of my pride/I come crawling on my knees/Begging you to carry me."

"Broken" is another collaboration with Wallace and it is a simple prayer, "Don't wanna be broken anymore/Don't want to see pieces of me shattered on the floor."

Ford Thurston co-wrote "Too Late" with Bonnie. It is a story of heartbreak. The leaving is done and it's "too late to change my mind."

The single that is blasting the charts, "Ain't Who I Was," written by Adam Hood and Brent Cobb, is very fitting to Bonnie's story. The lyrics say it best. "These days I'm good and I'm grown/and I'm wrong most of the time/Forgive or forget me if my reasons don't rhyme/But don't take it too hard/Hell it's just part of living the dream/When you pick and you sing/But I'm finally proud of who I am now/Cause I ain't who I was."

Another co-writer, Al Anderson, along with Bonnie, created "Not 'Cause I Wanted To." You can picture a road musician sitting alone in a hotel room writing these words, "Late at night in these hotel rooms/I think of all I've lost and all I put you through/And if I knew the reason, I would tell you why/Sometimes feelings just slip away/I only did what I had to/Not 'cause I wanted to." Jimmy Wallace's keyboard expertise shines through on this song.

"You Will Be Loved" is the final track on the album written by Jimmy Wallace and Bonnie.

"I've gotta warn you baby/This may change everything/I wouldn't blame you for walking out/When you hear what I have to say/This was supposed to be a temporary thing/But I might persuade you not to go/You will be loved."

Soulful, sincere, raw, honest and deliberate are what you'll find scattered throughout every song on this recording. This album was released on the Thirty Tigers label.

When asked if Bonnie had a motto or philosophy that she lives by, she didn't hesitate.

"My good friend, David Macias, has impressed on me his life philosophy and I have adopted it as my own. He always told me that no matter the circumstances, he knew to just show up; to really be present. So, even when I don't feel like I have everything I need or I'm not good enough ... whether it's an opportunity to perform or a lunch meeting or a chance to see a concert, when I get an opportunity, I just show up."

"And that is my philosophy. Just show up, trust and believe that something good is going to come ... let go and follow the process."

Show up to life!

You can see Bonnie Bishop at the Ranch Bash at Panther Island Pavilion in Fort Worth on October 22. For more information about tour dates, and all things Bonnie Bishop, visit bonniebishop.com.

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—BONNIE BISHOP