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Carolina Road restores its country accents

In the world of bluegrass, Lorraine Jordan is known affectionately as "The Lady of Tradition." As founding member and mandolin player of the Garner-based Carolina Road Band, Jordan earned her reputation with her passionate embrace of bluegrass music inspired by such first-generation pioneers as Bill Monroe, the Stanley Brothers, and Flatt and Scruggs.

In the past few years, however, Carolina Road detoured from traditional styles and into the trendy realm of "progressive bluegrass." With Carolina Road's second Rural Rhythm Records CD, "Back to My Roots," Jordan returns to the kind of music that the band started with in 1999.

"We spun off a little bit to country and a little to contemporary," says Jordan, who will perform with her band during their New Year's Eve concert party at the Garner Performing Arts Center. The double-bill will also feature the award-winning Russell Moore and Illrd Tyme Out.

"But I had so many people ... say, 'you have to get back to where you were because that's what people love, and there's not that much traditional music (being played) now.' "

Jordan's return to her roots was prompted by her love of the older style and by assembling the current lineup of Carolina Road, with singers and players who fit the older sound. When guitarist and vocalist Tommy Long joined last year, the final piece came together. Long tone lead singer, whose vocals fit seamlessly with Jordan and the others to craft authentic leads and richly textured harmonies. The other band members - Josh Goforth (fiddle), Ben Greene (banjo), and Ed Biggerstaff (bass) - are also veterans of the ancient tones.

"We've been getting a lot of compliments on our singing combinations," Jordan says. "I'm very country, I have a country accent. If you're going to sing traditional music, I think you've got to be from the South or at least you have to have that accent. Tommy and I both have a very country accent."

With the band in place, the next move was to find songs that suited their traditional ethos. They didn't have to look far: Six of the album's 12 songs were written by North Carolinians.

They include two by the legendary A.L. Wood and one by Clyde Moody, who played in early versions of Monroe's Blue Grass Boys. Long contributed two songs, and Jordan composed the title track. Others include songs from the Louvin Brothers ("Bald Knob Arkansas") and the Stanley Brothers ("Sharecropper's Son").

The album's first single, "A Light in the Window Again," was written by hall of fame songwriters Dixie and Tom T. Hall. Inspired by a tribute to Bill Monroe's home in Rosine, Ky., the song is moving up the bluegrass song chart.

The Halls have been among Carolina Road's most ardent supporters, and have written several songs recorded by the band over the years. "Bluegrass, I think, is 99 percent feel," said Dixie Hall in a 2003

interview. "Being around Lorraine Jordan and the group makes you feel like something is stirring. I want to be a part of that. I'm proud to have them sing anything that I have a part in writing."

Promoting women

Jordan has also been an advocate for women in bluegrass. She organized and produced two "Daughters of Bluegrass" CDs, featuring a host of women who sing, write and perform the music. Both albums have been honored with the IBMA Recorded Event of the Year trophy, in 2006 and 2009. A third CD will be released toward the end of next year.

In addition to her role as bandleader, Jordan is a successful entrepreneur. She owns Jordan Driving School, a Garner-based company with 277 employees. She hosts the Christmas in the Smokies festival in Pigeon Forge, Tenn., and the Cherokee Bluegrass Festival in Cherokee. She is also a partner in Garner's Hope Café, a 225-seat restaurant that hosts bluegrass music on Thursdays and praise music on Saturdays.

Regardless of where Jordan's enterprises lead her, she is certain to defy Thomas Wolfe's famous dictum that "You can't go home again." Because for Jordan, home is where the heart is, and her heart is squarely within the realm of traditional bluegrass.

"When we decided to go back to our roots, Rural Rhythm asked me to write a song about going back to the old ways," she says. "So I wrote 'Back to My Roots' about going back home. What it's saying is that we're going back to where Carolina Road started."

Read more here: <http://www.newsobserver.com/2011/12/30/1739336/carolina-road-restores-its-country.html#storylink=cpy>