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by Susan Marquez

Carolyn Eyerly never strayed far from home, but she's had experiences around the world. "I was born in Philly," she says, "but when I was young my dad found a job in the Washington, D.C. area. I've lived in Vienna, in Fairfax County, Virginia most all my life!" Married to her high school sweetheart, the couple has many mutual friends.

"We used to have a big mid-year party and invite everyone we knew, but over the years, it simply got too big!"

Those friends encouraged Carolyn to do many things in her life, including releasing her solo project, *The Sunny Side of Life*, in December 2020, featuring Gospel bluegrass tunes as well as seven of Carolyn's original compositions. "I chose them carefully, like building a setlist for a show," she explains. "The songs tell a story of the promise of God and of human frailties and angels." She jokes that she could have titled the album *Issues and Anger*. "These are Christian songs that I wrote and recorded. I sold my dream car, a 1966 Mustang convertible, to pay for it! I really miss that car."

Carolyn's musical career did not start early in her life, although she was surrounded by an outgoing and talented family.

"My dad was a musical theatre guy. He played lead roles in plays in college, but then he got married and had four kids,

so he had to focus on earning a living to provide for his family. My brothers and sisters were all singers, but we had no money for instruments.” Carolyn finally got her first guitar when she was in middle school. “I lent it to a friend’s big brother, who later said it was stolen. So that was that.”

Carolyn was in her high school’s choir and she sang in church.” At age 19, working as a carpenter’s helper with her fiancé, she had the fervent desire to pursue her dreams. “I joined the National Conservatory of Dramatic Arts. “I guess I grew up with a kind of racy life, but when our kids came along, we settled down.” Carolyn says she is a Christian, but she is also very human. While she had intentions of acting after her children were grown, music had an overwhelming draw on her.



Carolyn has been active on the bluegrass scene in Virginia for over a decade. “I used Meetup.com to find people who wanted to sing.” That led to Carolyn co-founding a D.C.-area folk group called Shenandoah Run. She used her training to lead the theatre program at her church. She then joined an all-female group called Sweet Yonder, a group nominated in 2019 for WAMMIE awards for best bluegrass band and best bluegrass album. “One of our outreach ministries is to sing comfort songs for the homeless.” That experience led Carolyn to write *As Though They Were King*, which she says is her real “message song.” The song is on her solo project. “It reminds us that we should be ambassadors for Jesus, not his henchmen.” One of her favorite songs on the project comes from an unplanned, but

memorable experience. "Christmas in a Dive Bar" was inspired by a family trip to Patagonia in Chile. "We had just finished our walk of the Patagonia trail, and it was Christmas Eve. Everything was closed, so we hit up a local dive bar. We had a wonderful time together – one we will never forget." Sometimes you find Jesus in the most unlikely of places.

The album ends with a cover in a cappella of Leon Patillo's "Go". It proclaims, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations. Go, go, go. Baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and Holy Ghost. Go, go, go."

"It's the great commission of the project, the one that sends people out into the world to do His work. I wanted this project to be my message, based on my experiences and understanding." Carolyn says the bluegrass world has been such a wonderful and welcoming community of people. "Everybody embraces and mentors you. We have some amazing, talented folks in this area." One of those people is Dede Wyland, one of the pioneering women in bluegrass. "Dede has been a mentor to me, and she agreed to produce my album. That's the level of support that we have in this bluegrass community."

Now that the Covid pandemic shows signs of slowing down, Carolyn says she looks forward to going to festivals again in the sprinter van she purchased for traveling. "We mainly play in this part of the country." One of Carolyn's favorite things to do at festivals is to participate in informal jam sessions. A strong promoter of "all things" bluegrass, she became the membership director on the D.C. Bluegrass Union.

"I want bluegrass to thrive!"