

Rhonda Vincent: Family and On-the-Job Training

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by Susan Marquez

She is known as “The Queen of Bluegrass,” and it’s a title the multi-award-winning performer Rhonda Vincent has rightfully earned. The Missouri native is an accomplished bluegrass singer, songwriter, and multi-instrumentalist whose career has spanned four decades, more if you count her childhood.

“I learned to sing when I was three,” Rhonda says. “I was on radio and television by the time I was five years old.”

Rhonda grew up around music. For five generations, her family entertained themselves and their community in the Ozark Mountain town of Greentop, Missouri, where Rhonda still lives. “There was a jam session every day at my grandparents’ house. I thought that was perfectly normal, and that everyone’s family was doing the same thing.” Instead, it was the kind of on-the-job training that would catapult Rhonda into the bluegrass stratosphere.

Rhonda started playing with The Sally Mountain Show, the stage name for the Vincent family’s bluegrass band that included her parents, Johnny and Carolyn Vincent, brothers Darrin and Brian, as well as aunts, uncles, and cousins. The band had a TV show when Rhonda was just five years old, and they performed at some very prestigious venues including the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville and the Lincoln Center in New York. “We were performing at the Grand Ole Opry when Garth Brooks made his debut performance there,” Rhonda recalls. The date was

June 24, 1989, and Garth sang *Tomorrow Never Comes*. Rhonda says the audience went wild. "It was like watching history being made. Reba McEntire was also on the stage that night. I felt so honored to be there."

The Grand Ole Opry has always been a special place for Rhonda. On February 28, 2020, she was singing a song at the Opry written by Jeannie Seely. "When I finished singing, Jeannie came out and asked me when I would get my next album finished. I said, 'when you write me some more songs.' Then she asked if I'd like to be a member of the Grand Ole Opry. I thought I was hearing things. That's something I've always dreamed of."

Of course, the COVID pandemic hit soon after that, and Rhonda was forced to wait 343 days, until February 6, 2021, to be inducted into the Grand Ole Opry. "It was such a thrill for me." Rhonda's brother, Darrin, is an Opry member as well. "We are the first brother and sister to be inducted. There are just over 200 acts that have ever been a member. To have two people, a brother and sister at that, from such a small town as Greentop is a really big deal!" Darrin is half of the award-winning duo Dailey and Vincent with Jamie Dailey.

It only makes sense that Rhonda's upcoming project with her band, The Rage, is Opry-themed. "Everything on it ties back to the Grand Ole Opry one way or another," she says. The album, titled *Music is What I See* has enjoyed a great response. *What Ain't To Be Just Might Happen* is a song written by Porter Wagoner. The song was first recorded in 1972. "I heard it on WSM and thought it would make a great bluegrass song. The lyrics are so relevant to everything going on in the world, from the pandemic to politics. I like it because it showcases our band, which is fantastic. I wanted songs that were hard-driving bluegrass." Listeners can't help but feel happy when listening to the upbeat tune.



The album also features several new songs, as well as classics that tie into the Opry thread, including *Slowly*, by Webb Pierce. “It also has the first bluegrass recording of *Unchained Melody*,” Rhonda says. The song has been recorded by several artists, most notably The Righteous Brothers’ version, recorded in 1965. The song was a challenging one for Rhonda. “It took twelve hours of recording to get it right.” One of Rhonda’s most requested songs is on the album as well. “We do *I Ain’t Been Nowhere*, a parody of Hank Snow’s *I’ve Been Everywhere*. The song has seven sections with 392 words, which is a lot for a song. It must be sung very fast. It’s really fun and always brings a smile.” The album wraps up with two Gospel tunes, *You Don’t Love God if You Don’t Know Your*

Neighbor, and the Isaacs join in with *There's a Record Book*.
"They are one of my favorite bands, so I'm really excited
about that track."



Still close to her mother, Carolyn, Rhonda says most people know her mom as a wonderful entertainer. “People outside our area probably don’t know my mom was an EMT for 30 years. She is also a beautician who once had five different shops. She’s never been one to sit at home and watch TV. She is a workaholic. She is also a very giving person. I’m who I am today because of her.”

