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The Wonders Of Wilderness

Craig Silliphant

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LOCAL SINGER-SONGWRITER EMBRACES LIFE OUTSIDE OF COMFORT ZONE



It's been a whirlwind year or so for songstress Carrie Catherine, who's just released a new album, *Wilderness*. She's also a relatively new mother to a bouncing baby boy named Eliot, and she was named a 2010 Saskatoon YWCA Woman of Distinction (for Arts, Culture, and Heritage). To top it all off, her song *Rockabye* was selected to accompany Ami McKay's book, *The Birthing House*, by the CBC's *Afternoon Edition*.

It's all been great — but it's pretty clear which event is the most important for Catherine.

"Having a baby last July has totally changed everything," she says, "and this is a change you'll also hear in my music. As a model for this new little being in the world, I feel compelled to always do my

best, not apologize for anything and live up to my fullest potential all the time: as a lover, singer, mother, friend and more."

"When I first had Eliot, I was songwriting for another project. Often it's hard to get time to write with my guitar in hand, especially in the early months when I had Eliot in my arms all the time. But I did a lot of songwriting in my head, and singing melodies out loud, which I then figured out on the guitar. [As well], touring with a baby is busy — so there's just no time to fret about the small stuff! That's a welcome change, actually; I play and perform with more abandon and I've stopped thinking about what I'm doing. Now I just do it."

A lot of the album was conceived in Nashville, as Catherine travelled there with the goal of learning from the greats and improving her craft. She met some great people, played with some stellar musicians, and even got to see the man himself, Al Green.

"I took some good advice," she says, "and went to the place where the best writers in the world thrive: Nashville. I'm also incredibly inspired by soul music and wanted to go where that musical tradition emerged. Visiting Memphis for the first time — and seeing Al Green preach in his own church — was life-changing, and I think the experience really informed my writing. Recording in Nashville really forced me to play in the moment with confidence, without any doubts or questions in my mind or heart."



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Wilderness was recorded in Nashville, and produced by Colin Linden (of Bruce Cockburn and Blackie and the Rodeo Kings fame). Catherine says Linden dialled up a warm percussive sound that reminds her of Stax Records recordings — and like those early recordings, much of the album was recorded live off the floor.

“I think it’s really rootsy and sensual,” she says. “The first track on the album, ‘Lullaby,’ is the first take of the song, and the first song we recorded. So you’re literally hearing the excitement and anticipation of bringing together amazing musicians and unleashing their passions.”

As for the title, Catherine had a loose concept or inspiration point that went along well with all the uncharted territory she was heading into.

“I think *Wilderness* is about breaking out of the routine and predictability of everyday life and opening myself up to new possibilities — literally getting out of the charted territory of my own backyard and diving into the unknown. I think my first journey down to Nashville was a trip into the metaphorical wilderness, and I remember feeling totally disoriented when I first arrived in a city where I didn’t know a soul. But what an exhilarating experience to go there and then find my way.

“The process of becoming a mother has also been a trip into the wilderness, where I’ve learned to look and listen, pay attention and be intuitive. I think there are a lot of ways that we can stay safe and confined. *Wilderness* is about change and movement and bravely stepping out of those confines.”

Catherine is heading off on a cross-Canada tour in support of *Wilderness*, but keep your eyes peeled for a chance to see Catherine live when she gets back. I was lucky enough to have Catherine and her percussionist, Hal Schrenk, as guests on my radio show, and they did a lot with a little.

“Hal and I have developed a really imaginative live show together. I love telling stories during the show, and Hal pulls out a lot of surprises as well. For example, he’ll perform on a shovel, hockey puck, and guitar case throughout the course of the show. So it’s more than just a simple repetition of the songs — our shows are all about creating real connections with an audience.”

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