

THE

# SESSION

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## CARRIE CATHERINE

Journey Into Wilderness

**BIG ZINGS<sup>8</sup>, REWIND<sup>11</sup>, THE BUZZ<sup>12</sup>, NEW RELEASES<sup>30</sup>  
SPOTLIGHT ON: CW STRINGWORKS<sup>21</sup>, STEVE GIBSON<sup>21</sup>  
AND PLENTY OF OTHER IMPORTANT STUFF**

PHOTO CREDIT: SHANNON BRUNNER



## CARRIE CATHERINE

### Journey Into Wilderness



BY LÉVI SOULODRE FOR THE SESSION

Carrie Catherine's got it covered.

The prairie chanteuse, known for her personable nature and sultry yet snug vocal stylings, vigourously welcomes The Session into the Hayloft, her Saskatoon home.

The space is a beautifully renovated and decorated modern loft-type artistic home that she and her husband, property developer and musician Curtis Olson, have made all their own. Adjacent to the front door are two special rooms. To the right, a classic Wheat Pool elevator façade decorates the exterior to her office space. To the left, a barn-like façade built with authentic prairie barn board yields a small doorway where Carrie's guitars can be seen, and which leads to Carrie's rehearsal space. And this is just the front of the Hayloft. A small stage

beckons in front of the barn music room, which then opens into a living room and kitchen area adorned with all forms of art. "It's really gratifying to be able to bring all sorts of events, from group performances to book readings, to this space," says Carrie proudly.

The Hayloft was built as a "doll house" Safeway – a small, one level mini grocery mart, one of the smallest in Canada in the 1930s. When they bought the building, it had been abandoned for years. "We gutted it, and found out it had these great ceilings beyond the lower suspended ceiling."

Community is a big part of everything Carrie does. She was recently a key contributor in producing LUGO – a multimedia art exhibit/showcase at the Mendel Art Gallery in Saskatoon.

“The whole idea was to bring together different disciplines, create collaborations and just create a sense of community.” She also immerses herself in the community through her teaching work. With a Masters in English, Carrie has taught a class on gender and popular music at the University of Saskatchewan – and today, greatly values the symbiosis between her teaching and music. “When I was teaching, I felt I should be doing music, and when I was doing music, I felt that I should be working on the class...for a lot of years I was doing a lot of different things, and I always felt I wanted to be more immersed in music, and I realized that it provided a really great balance,” Carrie explains. “Going to school gave me a break from the industry and provided perspective on music, and being in music gave me perspective on teaching...it also introduced me to different communities, which could translate into potential audiences for my music. I just kind of stopped thinking about it distracting me from music, and trusted that it was leading me in the right direction. That was a big moment.”

Now a proud mother, a theme reflected through and through upon her latest album, *Wilderness*, Carrie is finding balance between her family responsibilities and the demands of her growing presence in the greater music world. “People now say, ‘do you make a living with music?’ My answer is, ‘yes and no,’” she chuckles. “All of these things are moving in the direction – I’m doing songwriting workshops in schools, and I could’ve said that’s taking me away from my real direction with music, but it’s not; it expands my audience... those kids teach me more about creativity than any songwriter I’ve ever met, and it’s all what I love! So I stopped trying to define it, and go with it.”

Perhaps the greatest test of Carrie’s balance was to be found on her inaugural “Baby On Board” Western Canadian tour, with full family in tow, including newborn son Eliot. “We just got off tour with Eliot, and it was the best tour we’ve ever had,” Carrie enthuses. “We were forced to take breaks while driving. We were forced to slow down and enjoy where we were at, and I had everyone I love in the van with me!”

“I think years ago I realized I’m not just a musician; that’s a huge part of my life but my family [provides balance]: we all work around each other so that they can come on tour, and then there’s times when I need to give up music opportunities to be there for them; it all works out.”

Carrie’s tour was supported by the Saskatchewan Arts Board’s Culture On The Go program, and through FACTOR (the Foundation Assisting Canadian Talent On Record). Carrie emphasizes that while she’s grateful for the assistance, she’s hoping to use the opportunity as a launching pad to pursue tours independently, without necessarily having to depend on external financial contributions: “using [the funds I’ve received] to build a tour that then doesn’t require funding support,” Carrie says. The second leg of the tour will occur through October, to Ontario and Québec. “I have a lot of family out there, a lot of musicians that I’ve worked with, and it will be a great time to connect,” she adds.

Not that touring wasn’t without its share of challenges “We did the full tour as a duo,” Carrie explains. “[Percussionist Hal Schrenk and myself] really crafted the live show to a new level with backdrops – trees, lights, and really focused on (making) a really great show, but also (learned) where we need to change it so we can grow it, and make future tours more feasible too.”

“Before I got pregnant, I spent a lot of time asking myself, ‘how does it work? Is it possible to have a baby and still be a musician? How could I balance everything out, would the baby be ok?’ And, I realized that I couldn’t figure it out until I got pregnant,” she says. “...Just go with it, I still don’t really know how it works, but it does. We have a lot of support – a really great community. I definitely couldn’t do it without that kind of support. My mom came on tour with us too – she was the nanny.” Her husband, Curtis



PHOTO CREDIT: DAVID RENEE PHOTOGRAPHY



Olson, a musician himself, also proved to be the ideal all-around, behind-the-scenes roadie/sound guy. "He was dealing with sound issues, lighting, merchandising," Carrie says. Setting up his property development business so that he could put aside the time to join Carrie on the road has been a collective goal of the pair for years. "The first tour has shown us that this can work," Carrie affirms.

Carrie began her musical foray, as most musicians do, in a band. Her first band was called Leonard. Actually, she didn't begin playing guitar until the age of 18, only releasing her first solo album in 2003. Yet, Carrie always saw herself as a songstress: "I wrote music growing up, playing piano, and thought of myself doing this as a career."

Carrie's earliest musical recollection is "standing on the fireplace with a broom handle in hand singing Mini-Pops," she blushes. "I remember hearing songs I'd loved in elementary school; not knowing the lyrics; I'd rewrite them, and that's what really got me interested in lyrics, writing and poetry; that is my love," she says. "That's how I kind of got into it – the combination of music, lyrics and poetry...and spending a lot of time in karaoke bars!" she laughs. Her first performance on stage was "with a band that picked me up at a karaoke bar, doing cover tunes, but that was a very short-lived experience; I got into songwriting and playing my own guitar shortly after that."

Around this point in our conversation, baby Eliot is waking up from nap time, and joins us in the kitchen/living room loft space. He shines with a particular buoyancy; surely he gets that from his mother. "When he was first-born, I'd sing to him all the time, and he'd just love it," Carrie says lovingly. "He's getting a little busier – he'll be jumping about in the bouncer, and I'll pick up and plug in a guitar, and he'll be totally transfixed and love it."

"Now," she expresses, "he's almost 1, and he wants the guitar. He'll sit on the floor and strum the chords, and he's starting to sing...the other thing we noticed on the road is he saw [percussionist] Hal drumming all the time. At the very least, music's already playing a big role in his life, and it's part of our relationship."

"I don't really care if he becomes a musician or not," she continues. "It's really the appreciation from him that matters." Eliot enjoyed his first Hayloft concert at the age of only three months, and Carrie says that he "zones in and just listens."

In finding balance in her various endeavours, Carrie similarly draws inspiration from all things. "Everything I do is inspiration for a song," she says. "There's also that old idea of what it's like to be a musician; the starving artist, alone, you know? I think they're outdated ideas. Now, musicians can be family people. There's a million different ways to make a musical career, and

you can mold it to your life instead of feeling like you have to sacrifice everything to slog it out on the road...that's what I believe, anyway."

The title of Carrie's newest record, *Wilderness*, evokes many different images, including her own willingness to go about the recording process in a new way. "I wanted to try my hand at co-writing, and Colin Linden (renowned guitarist and album producer) was there [out on tour], and I was there, so we sat down to jam on a couple of my songs, and I thought to myself, 'holy sh\*t,' he played them as if he'd played these songs a million times!"

"He loved the songs," Carrie says. "It felt so natural. We even talked about touring together, we just really enjoyed playing together, and that's how we came to decide to make an album together. I didn't feel I was just calling him out of the blue saying, 'Can you produce this album?' It felt like we had a relationship going into [the album-making process]."

Again, the Arts Board supported Carrie's endeavours by providing funding for the making of the record, and she remains ever-grateful to the organization. The support most certainly paid off; the record flows so organically and features so many renowned musicians, that listeners might feel they've been transported back to the classic-sounding Nashville country/folk records of the '60s and '70s.

Carrie has nothing but praise for her recording comrades. "When we finally got to recording, Colin had been playing guitar on tour with Emmylou Harris, so he brought in her drummer and bass player for the project – it was so fun."

"I remember the first track on the album," recalls Carrie. "It's a song called Lullaby, but it's a real rocking tune. We were recording in this old house, and I'm sitting in one room, watching Colin playing through glass doors in another room, the bassist is to my right in the kitchen, and the drummer's in the living room. And I'm listening on the headphones to what they're playing, and Colin hears their version of what's going on – the players had only heard the song a few times, and when Colin and I looked at each other we just went, 'WOW!' – the track on the album is basically the first take of us coming together, so there's a real spontaneity to it, an immediacy, and I think it speaks to this connection we had right off the bat...I learnt a lot."

Perhaps the biggest highlight for both Carrie and Colin was working with the legendary Charlie McCoy, who's played with literally everyone, including the King himself, Elvis Presley. "[Wilderness] was a good excuse for Colin to work with Char-

lie," says Carrie. "It was kind of hilarious seeing Colin, whom I idolize, who's like a kid in a candy store getting ready for Charlie McCoy to show up, he was just so eager! He was maybe



[tracking] for half an hour, and just blew our minds – him playing harmonica on "Your Someone Else", and just feeling chills! The rest of the session we just sat back and listened to some of Charlie's stories."

*Wilderness* was, in the spirit of most classic Nashville records, recorded to tape, then in contemporary fashion, transferred to ProTools for final processing. "There wasn't a lot of splicing, different takes – maybe 2 or 3 takes of each song," says Carrie. "Both because it's more fun, and it's the way Colin prefers to play – it's quicker to record that way too." The album was fully recorded in Nashville over two sessions – in August for two weeks' of writing, and in December 2010. "And you were in there, and I didn't even know it!" she turns to say to Eliot.

"Wilderness is a metaphor for...obviously a lot of things, but parenthood, certainly."

And so, it appears Carrie's got all aspects of her life covered: songwriting, tour, new record, teaching, workshops, community art endeavours, and most importantly, a loving and supportive family. She admits, "I've never enjoyed performing the way I do now." In turn, Carrie's confidence is soaring higher than ever: "Eliot's not going to learn by what I tell him; he's going to learn by who I am; and it's forced me to give it all on stage, and not think to myself, 'am I good enough?'; and not think of distractions - they're gone."

"I'm a firm believer of setting a path, and making it happen no matter how."

Please visit [www.carriecatherine.com](http://www.carriecatherine.com) for more information. ●