



EMMYLOU HARRIS

WITH
IAN JANCO

By Hayden Seder

Our parents' music is the soundtrack of our formative years, shaping our memories and cultivating our tastes until we begin to develop passions of our own. In my parents' household, the folksy singing of artists like Joni Mitchell, Carole King, and, of course, Emmylou Harris, was a constant presence. Without giving it a second thought, songs of Emmylou's became the sound of family BBQs complete with children running throughout the house; weekends spent at our family cabin up north; and the winding down of a summer evening on the back porch. For an artist with 25 albums recorded over 40 years and more than 15 million records sold, it goes without saying that many have their own memories of Emmylou; perhaps a particular song, a particular album, or a great cover that makes you stop and say, "I know this!" Fans old and new will be treated to the country/folk crooning of this legend on August 8 when Emmylou will perform with opener Ian Janco at Sun Valley's River Run Lodge.

I was lucky to be granted an interview with Emmylou (news about which my parents both excitedly cried, "Oh my God! Did you invite her to dinner?!"). Despite years in the limelight, countless interviews, and a career worthy of books and movies, Emmylou was gracious, kind, and down-to-earth. But what can one possibly ask such a legend?

Let's start from the beginning.

"It was always about the song and being passionate about what I was doing," says Emmylou. "I feel that if you have the gift of music—if you can sing and perform—that you have a responsibility that music comes through you. It's not about the big hits (I

never really had any), but I was always able to reach an audience. It has to be about the story you're telling."

Telling stories has always been Emmylou's forte, with her expressive singing, straightforward songwriting, and an extensive list of interpretive covers by and collaborations with Gram Parsons, Bob Dylan, John Denver, Linda Ronstadt, Dolly Parton, Roy Orbison, The Band, Patty Griffin, Neil Young, and many more. "I just find a song that appeals to me, a story I want to tell. If I can't write it then hopefully I'll find one written by somebody else and just take it one song at a time," says Emmylou. "My friends inspire me and have provided a lot of songs over the years."

While she recorded her first album, *Gliding Bird*, in 1969,

Opposite page: Music sensation Emmylou Harris.



after dropping out of college to move to New York City to pursue music, Emmylou's first major label album, *Pieces of the Sky*, was released in 1975 and included covers of the Beatles' "For No One," Merle Haggard's "Tonight the Bottle Let Me Down," and the Louvin Brothers' "If I Could Only Win Your Love." It also featured "Bluebird Wine" by young songwriter Rodney Crowell, with whom Emmylou still collaborates today.

"When I did my first album, *Pieces of the Sky*, someone called and said I was number 107 on the charts," says Emmylou of the thrill of releasing the album. "I never thought I'd be on the charts. That was the moment when I said, 'That was your life before and now it's your life after.'"

Well known for her short-lived collaboration with, and education in country music by, artist Gram Parsons (who died of an overdose in 1973), Emmylou has spent a lifetime bringing attention to Parsons' achievements and writing songs about her life with and without him. One of her earliest songs, "Boulder to Birmingham," was written shortly after his death and showed her pain at losing a mentor at such a young age. Her 1985 concept album, *The Ballad of Sally Rose*, for which she co-wrote all of the songs, was semi-autobiographical and based loosely on her relationship with her former mentor. In 1999 she continued to pay tribute to Parsons by co-executive producing *Return of the Grievous Angel: A Tribute to Gram Parsons*, which featured more than a dozen artists, many of whom performed duets with Emmylou.

Throughout her many albums, collaborations, and tours, Emmylou has managed to float between traditional country, rock, folk, and all genres in between, reaching audiences far and wide. "My music has always been country,

sort of folk, story songs," says Emmylou of her style. "I'm still trying to figure out the songwriting process. As you get older, your music leans a little more toward the ideas of aging, mortality, and spirituality, but my music hasn't changed a whole lot since I first started."

With 13 Grammys, an induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2008, and an induction into the Grand Ole Opry in 1992, you might think there's nothing left to accomplish for Emmylou. But she's certainly not done yet. Her two *Trio* albums with Dolly Parton and Linda Ronstadt (the first released in 1987 to the biggest commercial success of Emmylou's career; the second released in 1999) will soon be released on a three-disc package with alternate takes and

outtakes. *The Traveling Kind*, a collaboration with the once unknown Rodney Crowell, was released in May of 2015. Emmylou is also busy with her activism including organizing an annual benefit tour, Concerts for a Landmine Free World; being a member of the Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; and supporting PETA as well as her dog rescue, Bonaparte's Retreat, in Nashville. "I have a dog rescue and a lot of my life is spent with the dogs and saving them because they keep you focused on the present and living in the moment. I hope for the next 10 years I can stay in the moment," says Emmylou.

As for the past 40 years? "There have been so many high points. You can't put a price tag on the amazing, gifted musicians I've gotten to play with. I don't think I would change anything about my career. It has allowed me to do what I wanted. I don't think I've ever had to compromise. I felt, 'I wanna do this and, by golly, I'm gonna do it.'"

"You want to touch an audience the way the music touches you." –Emmylou Harris



PHOTO BY ELISSA KLINE

Above: Ian Janco, who grew up on Carole King's Stanley, Idaho, ranch is opening for Emmylou Harris August 8 at River Run Lodge.

IAN JANCO

You may not have heard the name Ian Janco (pronounced “yawn-co”) yet but that’s certain to change soon. The Idaho native, who grew up on an isolated ranch near Stanley, just finished his second year at the Liverpool Institute for the Performing Arts (co-founded by none other than Paul McCartney) and is now opening for music legend Emmylou Harris. Not bad for a 21-year-old.

SVPN: You recorded your first songs at the age of eight. What attracted you to music at such a young age? Did your family influence/support your music-playing as a child?

Ian Janco: I was very lucky to grow up in a unique place, which in many ways laid the foundation for who I am as a musician and an artist. I was brought up on Carole King’s ranch near the gorgeous town of Stanley, Idaho. My parents were long-time caretakers for Carole’s property. They both have musical backgrounds—my mom worked as a studio engineer and eventually a studio manager for many years in New York, and my dad was always using the studio on the ranch to create and record his own music. I have lots of memories of watching him work. Eventually

he let me record my own songs, and was just always so supportive in teaching me to play and write. My mom has such a great ear. I was very lucky in that good music was always playing around the cabin.

SVPN: What artists or musicians influenced you growing up? Which influence you now?

IJ: The Beatles, Carole King (naturally), James Taylor, Stevie Wonder, Led Zeppelin. And now...John Mayer is a big one. Ed Sheeran and Jack Garratt are great as well.

SVPN: How would you describe your music?

IJ: It rides the spectrum between folk and Americana, but often with pop-influenced songwriting.

SVPN: How has your style and songwriting been affected (if it has) between living in Idaho, Santa Cruz, and Liverpool?

IJ: They’re all very unique places, with so much to offer. Idaho influenced me a lot with its beautiful scenery, the isolation of where I lived, and the pace of life. Living in the mountains begs for a

certain type of playing—fingerpicking and simple chords. Santa Cruz, being by the beach, gave my songs quite a laid-back feel. I was exposed to tons of different genres, played in rock bands, and produced hip-hop and dance music from time to time. Since moving to Liverpool, I've been lucky enough to see a lot of incredible bands, and I'm just surrounded by immensely talented and creative people every day at LIPA. Living in such a rich and varied culture really pushes me to improve my skills.

SVPN: How did you decide to attend the prestigious Liverpool Institute for the Performing Arts?

IJ: I took a gap year after graduating high school and backpacked around Europe. I was planning to go back to college in Santa Cruz, but my mom, who is possibly one of the world's biggest Beatles fans, told me about LIPA, which was co-founded by Paul McCartney. He pops in from time to time! She urged me to apply, so I did. I got an audition, and miraculously, I got in!

SVPN: How has your music changed since first attending LIPA and now finishing your second year?

IJ: I've dabbled a lot. I've played guitar in a psych-rock band, drums in a punk band, and arranged percussion for a dance show as well as performing my original songs on a regular basis. All the people I've worked with have their own talents and they all leave an impression. My songwriting has become a little more pop-minded, and I've also been able to watch a lot of great performers and learn from them. Collaboration has been invaluable to me.

SVPN: Despite the attention you've already seen in your music career, you are still in what might be seen as the "infant" stage of your career. Where would you like to see your music go? What, as an artist, do you strive to do better or differently in your music?

IJ: Well, I hear a lot of sounds which don't fit into the same folk/Americana sphere—so I want to carry on my style of writing but play with a wider range of sounds—percussion, world instruments, choirs, the lot. I mean, there's always room to improve in terms of my skills, but one thing that I always want to be growing and experimenting with is audience participation. There's so much potential in a crowd to change the atmosphere of a place. I'd love everyone to leave my concerts feeling elated and connected more deeply to themselves and to the people around them.

SVPN: Tell me about your debut album *Stronghold*. What made you finally produce a full-length album after playing music for so many years? What was the process behind it—both in terms of songwriting and recording?

IJ: After getting back from travelling in Europe, I only had six months until I moved to Liverpool for my first year at LIPA, so I let that be a deadline to get this album made. I felt like the songs needed to be recorded and released. It was really a joy to make that record. Some of the songs were written on the trip through Europe, with only a little acoustic guitar. I was travelling with my then girlfriend, and she helped to inspire a lot of what the album became. It has shades of Europe and Santa Cruz. It's really just me reflecting what was happening in my life. It's about love and heartbreak, and finding your place in the world.

SVPN: How did you get the gig to open for Emmylou Harris, especially as someone who's still in school?

IJ: When we lived in Hailey, and even when we still lived on the ranch, the Sun Valley Center was the cultural hub of our world. I took art classes, went to exhibits and concerts that they put on. My mom is friends with some of the people, and I grew up with their kids. Apparently, moms get together to talk about what their kids are doing even after we leave home. So when I went to Liverpool my mom shared what I was up to. Kristine Bretall, the Director of Performing Arts, heard an interview I did on BBC and she liked my music. She was instrumental in getting me this gig.

SVPN: What's it like to be coming back to your home state of Idaho to play with such a music legend?

IJ: It's unreal. I honestly can't express what an honor it is to open for Emmylou. She's truly an inspiring and important artist with such a strong legacy. It's also pretty exciting to be coming home to visit Stanley and Hailey, and to be playing at River Run, where I saw James Taylor at my very first concert when I was five years old. I really can't wait to play this show, meet Emmylou, and reconnect with my friends and the beauty of Idaho!

Emmylou Harris and Ian Janco will perform August 8 at 7pm at River Run Lodge. Regular entry: \$45/member, \$55/non. Early entry: \$75/member, \$85/non. Kids (12 and under) \$25. For tickets and more information visit sunvalleycenter.org.