

Music: Family Tradition

January 10, 2013

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Hailing from Southern music royalty, Holly Williams is forging her own path

>[Click here](#) to listen to a track from Williams's album *The Highway*

Holly Williams is puttering around the kitchen, making cinnamon-coated short ribs for a dinner with friends later tonight. A devout cook, Williams—the daughter of Hank Williams, Jr., and granddaughter of Hank Sr.—hosts two or three dinner parties a week when she’s at home in Nashville. “Cooking is my therapy,” she says with a laugh. “I’ve never seen a psychiatrist. I’d rather watch a pan sizzle.”

Food, though, is second to her music. And after a nearly four-year break, when, she says, “I was bathed in domesticity,” Williams has returned with her third album, *The Highway*, a collection of quiet, mostly acoustic songs that contain her most personal lyrics to date. The subject matter is striking in its intimacy: The raw “Waiting on June”—featuring harmony vocals from her friend Gwyneth Paltrow—is a detailed account of the life of her now-deceased grandmother in Louisiana, June Bacon White. “I yearn for the simple life in the South,

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before cell phones, computers,” Williams says. “I miss the sound of the dinner bell that rang before everyone gathered for a family meal.” A second highlight, “Giving Up,” is the harrowing tale of someone close to her who is a mother of two but is spiraling downward in the claws of alcoholism. “Sometimes I think I’ll get an angry phone call from someone I wrote a song about,” she says. “But I’m not very good at making things up.”

Another song, “A Good Man,” has its roots in a near-fatal car wreck she was in with her older sister Hilary in 2006, outside of Tunica, Mississippi. Her sister was pronounced dead at the scene but was miraculously resuscitated. She has since had twenty-eight surgeries to bring her body back to some level of normalcy.

The accident forced Williams to take stock of her life. “Before it was all about me,” she says. “And afterwards it was so not.”

As she took time to help care for her sister, she focused on things outside of music, including opening a clothing store, H. Audrey, which after a roller-coaster ride through the economic downturn has become one of Nashville’s premier purveyors of designer fashion. And although she released an album, *Here with Me*, in 2009, she toured sparingly, concentrating on her home life and getting married to longtime friend and bandmate Chris Coleman. “‘A Good Man’ is about him,” she says. “He’s probably embarrassed, but I don’t care. He’s been my rock through everything.”

The events of recent years have also brought her closer to her famous father, with the two frequently hunting deer at his farm two hours outside of Nashville. “He’s not Bocephus to us; he’s Dad,” she says, referring to her father’s infamous nickname. “Nothing makes him happier than going for a walk in the woods with his kids.” He made Williams even more thrilled when he handed down an ivory-grip, nickel-plated, U.S. service .38 special revolver that belonged to Hank Sr. “He would give it to the nanny when he went on tour so she could protect little Hank,” she says, still a bit slack jawed. “It means the world to me.”

With her life firmly rooted on solid ground, Williams is now eager to tour. After all, there’s a reason the record is called *The Highway*. “I’m a performer,” she says. “I have all of these things that I love doing, but I yearn for the road. A lot of blood, sweat, and tears went into this record, and I’m ready to share it.”