

Carolina Road's Lorraine Jordan has noticed a trend throughout the past few years. There has been an undeniable influx of Classic Country artists and fans who have been making the rounds at Bluegrass festivals around the country.

"It's nothing against New Country, but there are people that want to hear it the way it used to be, and they feel like they're not getting that anymore. So, they've been coming to Bluegrass festivals looking for it. For a lot of the legendary country artists out there, they still might be playing but not as much. I thought 'Why don't we put some of these artists on a bluegrass project and make some new fans for them?' That's exactly what she has done with the new release *Country Grass*, which features many of those heritage artists such as Crystal Gayle, Lee Greenwood, John Conlee, Jim Ed Brown, Eddy Raven, Marty Raybon, T.G. Sheppard and Lynn Anderson.

Lorraine was the Public Relations producer and Josh Goforth was the in studio producer for the album, and Carolina Road, (Lorraine, Josh, Ben

Greene, Tommy Long, Jason Moore and Brad Hudson) provided the instrumental background on the songs, while the artists performed their classics. Jordan says it was an honor to be involved with so many legends, though there was a little bit of a learning curve involved. "I grew up listening to all of these artists, and it was so amazing to be working with them. Many of them hadn't recorded Bluegrass before, and bluegrass music's format is so metered. It's all straight ahead, 'boom-chop, boom-chop,' as to where Country flows in and out. So, when they started, they would say 'This is a little different; isn't it?' I would say 'Yeah, you've got to sing it fairly straight, and you can't really venture off anywhere.' But, they enjoyed it. Everyone that came in to Skaggs Place Studio said 'We love Bluegrass, and are so glad that you are keeping us and the old sounds alive.' This is something we wanted to do not just to have a new fan base, but we wanted to do our part and show our loyalty."

With a track list that includes such award-winning classics as "Rose Garden," "Dixie Road," "Do You Want to Go to Heaven," and "I'm Just a Common Man," what was Jordan's method for song selection?

“I just thought about legendary country artist and who would fit into bluegrass. There were some that we thought about, but a lot of country artists have vibrato in their voice. It’s hard to put down a lot of bluegrass harmonies when you have a lot of that. Bluegrass harmonies are so tight and close together, and in country music, the lead voice is out front, with the harmony singers in the back. However, in bluegrass, they are all equal – mixed with the same volume. Therefore, I thought some artists would not work as well with the bluegrass style.”

Of course, Jordan also knew she had to adapt the songs on an instrumental level, as well. “I was thinking about songs that we would be able to add a straight bass beat and a rolling banjo to. If we could, I thought we could do this song,” she surmised.

One track that didn’t need a lot of changing around was “Ready for the Times to Get Better,” a number one hit for Crystal Gayle from 1978. The two-time

CMA Female Vocalist of the Year reprises her vocal on the song, with help from Jordan.

“That was a perfect song for the album. I was so honored to sing the song with her. We laid down the music tracks first so she could see how we had to do the song. There actually wasn’t a lot of changing or rearranging for that song because it already had the rhythm of the bluegrass sound with it,” she says, in recollecting the starkness of the original release.”

Jesse Keith Whitley appears on the gorgeous cover of “Don’t Close Your Eyes,” a 1988 hit from his father, Keith Whitley. Getting to work with the second-generation performer was a great experience, Lorraine said, but also served as an opportunity to remind listeners of the Whitley Bluegrass tradition.

“Of course, his dad was a legendary bluegrass performer, and I had the honor of performing at the same festivals with him when he was with J.D. Crowe.

Of course, Jordan didn't make the record alone, as her band Carolina Road played a huge hand in the album. Between banjoist Ben Greene, fiddler Josh Goforth, guitarist Tommy Long, bass player Jason Moore and guest artist on dobro Brad Hudson there is 50 years of experience there alone. Jordan is grateful for their loyalty. "They have stuck with me, and we've got a lot of longevity as a band. When you play together that long, you already know what the other person is going to do. Those guys are some of the finest bluegrass musicians they are," she says. Josh Goforth did a terrific job as the in studio producer. He and our engineer Wes Easter have great ears for the music. Josh brought in some great arrangements for the songs. With the band's recent 2015 SPBGMA win for Song of the Year (for "That's Kentucky," a song recorded from the pen of Co-writer Dixie Hall), traditional female vocalist and banjo player of the year the group is beginning to receive the attention they so long have merited. "It's finally starting to pay off. We've been out there fifteen years, and we're finally getting awarded for it."

The band is planning to take the music to the people this summer, and many of the artists on Country Grass will be there, as well. “We’re so excited. We’re calling it the ‘Country Grass Tour.’ We’ll be doing some shows with The Kentucky Headhunters, and we just did a video with them on ‘Runnin’ Water,’ and it’s hard-driving. We wanted the first single to be more on the bluegrass side than the country side. We wanted to come out with something different, and I think it turned out great. There’s some great harmonies with me singing with Doug and Richard, and Josh Goforth singing baritone on it. Eddy Raven will join us for some shows, and I think a lot of his songs like ‘I Got Mexico’ and ‘Who Do You Know In California’ falls right in with bluegrass. He’s the perfect person to join us. I think it’s definitely going to be a year to remember.”

Country Grass will be released June 9, 2015.