

Rhonda Vincent – Only Me

Rhonda Vincent was told her voice was too “bluegrass” for mainstream country music. When she sang bluegrass, fans raved that they loved her “country music.”

There is only one voice and there is only one Rhonda Vincent. But IS she a bluegrass singer or a country singer? The simple answer – yes.

Vincent answers the “bluegrass or country” question once and for all with “Only Me” (Upper Management), her ambitious double-album that is a little bit country, a little bit bluegrass and a whole lot awesome. Across twelve songs – six bluegrass songs on one CD, six country songs on the other – Vincent shows that she is a true artist not confined by strict musical genres or corralled by boundaries set in place by corporate music honchos. Vincent is a singer’s singer, true and pure.

“Only Me” is a tour de force of American music. Bluegrass and country music are part of the same family, branches from a shared musical root system that also spawned blues, jazz, and rock and roll. Whether Vincent sings “Drivin’ Nails in My Coffin,” a classic Ernest Tubb song written by Jerry Irby, in bluegrass style or country style does not matter. The song is the same. The voice is the same.

Bluegrass fans should not worry. Vincent and her hot band the Rage are bluegrass artists, first and foremost, and always will be. “Only Me” gives Vincent the chance to stretch creatively and sing in ways that bring out new colors and explore new depths of her amazing voice.

“My voice is the common denominator in all of this,” Vincent said. “It’s always exciting to hear each individual’s perception when they hear it for the first time.

“This project displays every aspect of my voice, without changing our bluegrass shows, or appearances. We discovered there is a market for the traditional country music style, featuring the true sounds of the steel guitar and triple fiddles.

“We found this demand by the incredible sales of my all-duet project with Gene Watson, and Country’s Family Reunion performances. It’s exciting to merge both styles into one project.”

Guest appearances on “Only Me” include Willie Nelson and Daryle Singletary – and that’s on the bluegrass songs. Vincent also recorded a pair of Bill Anderson numbers and she does a countrified take of her own unreleased song, “Teardrops Over You,” which she wrote when she was 16 years old.

“Only Me” was inspired by Vincent’s performance on the Grand Ole Opry the day after George Jones died on April 26, 2013. She sang one of George’s songs, “When the Grass Grows Over Me,” a song that she recorded for the country CD of “Only Me.”

In fact, it was while opening for Jones in 2000 that she understood how blurry the line can be that separates bluegrass and country music. Vincent had grown up playing in a family band called the Sally Mountain Show, a musical outfit that featured her father, Johnny, mother, Carolyn, little brothers, Darrin and Brian, and her, all singing a mix of music that included songs by the Louvin Brothers, Loretta Lynn, Bill Monroe and Kitty Wells. For a young Rhonda Vincent, all of those songs got rolled up into a single ball.

First, she sang bluegrass. Then she recorded a couple of mainstream country albums in the 1990s, when makeup artists cared more about her looks than her sound. She was asked if she could “get the bluegrass out of her voice.” Confused and heartbroken, she decided to go full-bore into bluegrass music and formed her incredible band The Rage. One night in Salem, Va., while opening for The Possum, Rhonda Vincent and the Rage blew the roof off the building. Afterward, as she signed autographs and sold out of bluegrass CDs, Vincent listened with awe as new fans gushed, “We love your country music!”

So be it.

Anyone who knows a mandolin from a Martin guitar knows that Vincent is the bona fide Queen of Bluegrass, a soulful singer who was named Female Vocalist of the Year seven consecutive times by the International Bluegrass Music Association. She has also recorded contemporary country albums and sung with her close friend Dolly Parton, recorded with Willie Nelson and opened for George Jones. Bluegrass or country, country or bluegrass, her voice is unique, recognizable and flawless. It’s only her.

“Whatever you hear when you listen to this CD, I hope you love it as much I loved creating it,” she said.