

Press

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Praise for "Black Top Road":

"Angela Easterling

is a bright shining star on the country/folk/alt.music horizon! Her gift is so special. She will be able to perform and record as long as she wants to. I loved listening to her new "Black Top Road" CD! The instruments are multidimensional and have a luster that I love. Brought me back to the time the Byrds recorded "Sweetheart of the Rodeo" - tradition meets youthful exuberance! I love the Jingle Jangle guitars on "American ID"; -Roger McGuinn (founder of The Byrds) (Jun 22, 2009)

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"Angela Easterling, we now know, is a quietly plaintive singer who rewards attentive listening. Her Blacktop Road, with its mandolins, dobros, lap steels, peddle steels, fiddles, etc., is out-and-out "alt. country." A lot of the songs here sound like they've been around for years—that's a compliment—including the sweetly yearning cover of a certain Wannabe Southern Man's "Helpless." Produced by the agile and sensitive Will Kimbrough. - Oxford American, Editors Picks for June 2009

"Best Political Country Song" - Angela Easterling - "The Picture" - Daniel Gewertz, Boston Herald, Best of 2009 Music (December 11, 2009)

"Dynamite honky-tonk singer Angela Easterling brings a tough traditionalist sound to ballads and ravers alike on her fine new CD Black Top Road." - Philadelphia Inquirer (Jun 21, 2009)

"If Steve Earle was reborn as a girl, he'd very likely be Angela Easterling. And Blacktop Road is her Guitar Town

. She comes surging out of the chute like a spurred bronco, full of sideways kicks, bucking with all the compressed energy of a coiled steel spring." - Steven Stone, Vintage Guitar Magazine (Oct .09 issue)

"Our fair newcomer tonight was Angela Easterling, who brought along her new album's producer, the great Will Kimbrough for a trio set that showed off her grace and songwriting prowess. She's a folk singer at heart, but the title track of her current album was a rocking portrait of her family farm's battles with the encroachment of shopping malls and other sorts of "progress." BlackTop Road bears all the hallmarks of a smart songwriter with a sharp eye for both the past and future." —Craig Havighurst, Music City Roots (Nov. 18, 2009)

"BlackTop Road is soaked in an intelligence and far-reaching historical sense that makes you suspect its origins couldn't be entirely human, or at least that all of these songs and performances couldn't have emanated from one young woman...the clarity and consistency of the narrative voice make (you) feel like you're learning quite a bit about Angela Easterling. Above all else, the thing you'll learn is that, regardless of what may come her way, she'll be fine. There's no stopping a talent of this magnitude." -C.M. Wilcox, Country California (Oct. 1, 2009)

"There's an old head on young shoulders in her writing and she shows that underneath there's a burning ambition to not be good, but to be great...there's a personal honesty and splash of life that jumps out at you. These songs are about place, about family, about belonging and in opposition as much about rebellion, not fitting in, leaving and growth." -Andrew Williams, Americana UK (September 8, 2009)

"Angela Easterling — Black Top Road - Roots/Rock sweetheart with a folk sense of cultural activism" TwangNation Best CD's of 2009 (December 18, 2009)

"Nashville's overripe with young female singers who want to be the next Taylor Swift, or the next Gretchen Wilson. Thanks, but no thanks. Then you have singers like Angela Easterling, whose music doesn't kowtow to commerce - the songs on BlackTop Road focus on her sparkling, honey-hewn voice, etched with traces of sorrow and hopefulness in equal measure. Produced the estimable Will Kimbrough, the CD is pure, mountain-air acoustic country music. Let's put it this way: Think Emmylou Harris, Alison Krauss or even Gillian Welch. Very sweet stuff indeed. Highly recommended." -Bill DeYoung, Connect Savannah (November 3, 2009)

"This is a road trip worth taking... BlackTop Road should be the perfect companion piece to Steve Earle's Copperhead Road. On her personal protest song, an angry Easterling verbally kicks ass as some South Carolina land in her family since the late 18th century is being grabbed by the state for development. The song and the singer seem destined for a spot in Farm Aid." - Michael Bialas, blogcritics.org (August 3, 2009)

"Borrowing Will Kimbrough from Todd Snider's band to produce and play on

Blacktop Road was a stroke of genius for Angela Easterling. Kimbrough surrounds Easterling's gutsy vocals with some whip-crackingly smart country power-pop on the title track and offers sympathetic sounds even on the more emotional ballads... A pretty voice and poignant songwriter surrounds herself with A-list players and puts out a great alt-country album." Kevin Oliver, Free Times Favorite CD's of 2009 (January 7, 2010)

"Angela Easterling isn't just one of the finest singer-songwriters in the Upstate, she's also one of the best in the entire Americana field. "BlackTop Road" features everything from Steve Earle-like angst to Gillian Welch-type introspection." Dan Armonaitis, Spartanburg Herald (January 14, 2010)

"Easterling's mix of "gee-whiz" stage presence and solid songwriting and singing was one of the most rewarding, surprising sets of the weekend" Curtis Lynch, Playgrounds Magazine Review of 2009 Americana Music Festival (October 2009)

"Lovely (and theater-trained) vocals, penetrating songs, and a restless heart that always finds its way back home with stories to tell." - Rick Cornell, Country Standard Time (July 31, 2009)

Funny how what people mean when they say "country music" really means "Bon Jovi with a drawl." Funny how "country music" is a pejorative. Funny how you probably know at least a few people who'll swear they love "everything but country." Funny how Angela Easterling makes "em all look like morons. It's not about the genre as much as the tradition and the sonic simplicity. Easterling's got it pretty well summed up: "You'll find me out on this stage/With just one microphone." It doesn't take much for Easterling to land her smooth Americana balladry square in next-Tift Merritt territory, just a strong voice, a sharp band and a handful of well-written story-songs.
B. Reed , Free Times, June 18, 2010

"I produced Angela Easterling's record, but all I had to do is show up for class and play along. She is a powerful, focused artist who has done her homework: rock n roll, country, bluegrass, literature and French pop." -Will Kimbrough

"Highly recommended release from one of our favourite artists." - Smart Choice Music, UK (July 14, 2009)

"If "Earning Her Wings" announced Easterling's arrival, "BlackTop Road" shows that she's here to stay. Easterling handles soul-searching topics fearlessly and gracefully, weaving stories that entrance as much by her warm, inviting voice as by her heartfelt lyrics." - Craig Ostroff, Montgomery News (Jun 25, 2009)

"If you want an excellent example of what Americana that 5 layer dip of genres has to offer you need to put on Easterling's

Blacktop Road. She delivers in her earnestly melancholic voice and her expanded tastes and sensibilities that sound right at home in a honkytonk or a NY supper club…. For all braying about social messages in contemporary country music they are like crayon scribbling compared to finely crafted song like “The Picture”.- Twangnation.com (Jun 22, 2009)

“The "back to roots" attitude that Easterling brings to her fine new project transcends any casual lipservice. Fiddles and banjos trade space with slide guitar and some charged honkytonk rhythms for an album that has one foot firmly planted in the traditional southern music, the other in the modern interpretations of Americana. It's a balancing act that blossoms on track such as the wistful slow-dance ballad "Just Like Flying", charming French twanger "Un Microphone" and jukebox raver title track. Recommended.” - DirectCurrentMusic.com (Jun 29, 2009)

"Angela Easterling's BlackTop Road is one attractive album. Smartly produced by Will Kimbrough, the set holds originals plus a lovely take on Neil Young's "Helpless". The album's sound is folk-rock, strongly executed throughout." Michael Tearson, Sing Out! (Vol. 53 #2)

"A heartfelt album of personal experience, adding youth to tradition. An intelligent and Introspective writer." Larry Kelly, Maverick UK, (January, 2010)

"Angela has just about the prettiest voice to come out of the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. While she claims Emmylou Harris as an influence (and wears it quite well), there’s also a spark of youth in her voice more reminiscent of someone with a rock background, like Jenny Lewis. She can also knock out an Appalachian rocker that sounds like early Steve Earle, such as the title track from her album BlackTopRoad" - Tug Baker, Free Times Columbia (Jun 11, 2009)

"Easterling is a songwriter who makes listeners feel, think and see. The world can be ugly, but somehow her voice can make anything softer, easier to manage. Harsh stories have beauty. " - Otis Taylor, The State (Columbia, SC) (Jun 11, 2009)

“The songs are thoughtful and well-crafted stories that will resonate with a deep intensity with many listeners on a variety of different levels. Angela Easterling is someone to keep a sharp eye on.” – Bob Gottlieb, Folk and Acoustic Music Exchange (Jun 23, 2009)

Praise for “Earning Her Wings”

"This is country Roots rediscovered and played the way it was always meant to be played."

- SmartChoiceMusic.com

"Enjoyable from beginning to end. Angela has her finger (and voice) on the pulse of the style." - Robert Francos, Jersey Beat

"Easterling has created an enchanting brand of neo-traditionalist country that mixes hard-edged honky tonk with fetching ballads. Her voice is a gorgeous instrument."

- Jim McGuinness, Kingsport Times

"Songs that are sure to get your toes tappin', whether they're in cowboy boots, business shoes or flip-flops." - Craig Ostroff, Montgomery News Ticket

"She's a quality, standout artist. Her music just jumps out of the speakers."

- Tommy Joyner (MilkBoy Coffee), King Of Prussia Courier

"Easterling tussles her country ballads as if they were hair, leaving the strands sweetly knotted. Her voice can be a soaring falsetto or a raspy whirl. She's not your usual country girl and, for her music's sake, her attitude is very welcome."

- Otis Taylor, The State

"Angela's one of my personal new favorites. Her debut album is amazing from the opening track to the last." - Take Country Back.com

**I try to keep this up to date, starting with most recent press and working back. They may be a little out of order, but

that's the general premise. **

Angela Easterling to perform free concert in Randolph Sunday

by Sue Bruskin-Clarke, NJ Daily Record 4-17-10

Singer/songwriter Angela Easterling's heartfelt lyrics speak volumes about her life and the world around her. It's only fitting that she'll be bringing her traditional-based sound to the Randolph Township Public Library this Sunday for a free afternoon show.

The South Carolina native's style is best described as "Americana," a genre that draws from the roots of American music — blues, country, rock, bluegrass — but also has an eye toward the future.

"I never felt that my music was country and it didn't fit in with folk, but with Americana, there's a lot of variety," Easterling says. "I like to put out CDs with songs that don't all sound the same.

"Americana music is very organic without a lot of over-processed dishwasher pop," she says. "There's a very real quality to it."

Easterling's most recent CD, "BlackTop Road," couldn't get more real, with songs that explore familial ties and human emotions. The title track tells the true tale of her family's struggle to hold onto its centuries-old farmland in the face of widespread development. Another, "Stars Over the Prairie," was penned by her great-grandfather in the 1940s.

"This is a very personal album for me," she says. "There is so much of my family in it. The themes are family and home and looking for a home. I think there is also a theme of where the past, present and future intersect and have an effect on each other. Sometimes it seems like the future is trying to destroy the past. But we can't escape the past; it still haunts us."

Also included on the CD is a cover of the Neil Young hit "Helpless."

"I am a huge Neil Young fan," she says. "He's one of the people I fantasize about performing live with."

Others include the Indigo Girls, Emmylou Harris and Roger McGuinn, who praised "BlackTop Road," saying it brought him back to the time The Byrds recorded "Sweetheart of the Rodeo."

"Roger McGuinn is such an influential person in music and has been so kind to me," Easterling says. "His complimentary words made me feel that as an indie artist who is struggling to make it, I'm on the right track."

As a child, Easterling's list of entertainment idols was quite different than it is now. A self-described fan of musical theater, she grew up listening to Judy Garland, Julie Andrews and Broadway soundtracks, and later went on to major in musical theater at Emerson College in Boston.

"My plan was to go to New York and be on Broadway," she says.

Things changed freshman year when Easterling purchased her first guitar and discovered the Indigo Girls, Tori Amos, Sarah McLachlan, Emmylou Harris, The Carter Family, Hank Williams and others who helped influence her style.

"I still love musical theater, though, and would love to get back to it some day," she says.

Easterling says her musical theater training ties into her life as an Americana singer.

"With theater training, you learn how to preserve your voice, which is very important, especially when you're on tour," she says. "Another thing is the idea of using music to tell a story. Growing up with musical theater, the idea of music telling a story got ingrained in me, so now I like my songs to go somewhere and my performances to go somewhere."

Stories are a key part of Easterling's live shows.

"I especially like a library show because it gives me a chance to tell people the stories behind my songs. This gives people who haven't heard me before something to connect to," she says.

Seven Days Vermont, 4-22-10

A South Carolina-based Americana songstress interweaves original works with the classic tunes that shape her melodies.

On the surface, South Carolina and Vermont have little in common. But listeners will draw unexpected parallels as visiting Americana songbird Angela Easterling digs into ditties of her home state off her second release, *BlackTop Road*. With lines like "They're gonna lay down a blacktop road / Don't you try to complain / You just do what you're told," the album's title track focuses on her family's 1791 homestead — and their fight to keep the land. Ring familiar? Themes of family, home and the search for identity further add to the universal relevance of Easterling's sounds. At a family-friendly solo acoustic show in Jericho this week, she'll also perform the classic folk, rock and country songs that influence her, and chat about the craft of songwriting. Write on.

Free Times Columbia SC, May 7, 2010:

Greer native Angela Easterling might not be the household name that last weekend's trio of country music superstars who played Columbia are, but she's got more genuine country music in her than all three of them put together. Her 2009 disc *Blacktop Road*, produced by Will Kimbrough (who's worked with Todd Snider and Jimmy Buffett), is a whip-smart collection of rootsy pop and country folk that earned her a showcase gig at the most recent Americana Music Association conference.

K. Oliver

The State, Columbia, SC, May 7, 2010, Picks of the Week:

Angela Easterling and The Beguilers at Rhythm on the River. Angela Easterling, a wonderfully charming singer, now has a backing band appropriately named The Beguilers. We're used to hearing Easterling, a Kerrville New Folk Finalist for the second year in a row, perform solo around here. This show should only add allure to her music. Otis Taylor

Read more: <http://www.thestate.com/2010/05/06/1275482/otis-taylors-picks-of-the-week.html#ixzz0oJCnaGXJ>

Review on Country California by C.M. Wilcox 10-01-09

There's an almost otherworldly quality to Angela Easterling's sophomore disc, a largely self-written Americana affair produced by singer/songwriter/sideman extraordinaire Will Kimbrough. *BlackTop Road* is soaked in an intelligence and far-reaching historical sense that makes you suspect its origins couldn't be entirely human, or at least that all of these songs and performances couldn't have emanated from one young woman. Easterling, whose voice comes with nary a hint of twang, offers one possible explanation in the eerie "A.P. Carter's Blues":

I've been haunted by a spirit I can't seem to lose

Since I got that old Clinch Mountain dust upon my shoes

I stood up at his grave and I thanked him for his song

But when I walked back down that hill, I didn't walk alone

Infected by the spirit of A.P., the album is at its most historical with timeless-sounding originals like "Field of Sorrow," a beautiful message from beyond the grave that would fit right in with the Carter Family catalog, and "Stars Over the Prairie," Easterling's reworking of lyrics originally composed by her great grandfather.

Even when the sound is more contemporary, the interests are often deeply historical. "The Picture" grapples with legacies of racism, as the narrator discovers a picture of a black man hanging amid her deceased father's personal effects and wonders what role he played in the event. The worst part is the uncertainty of not knowing the whole story ("Cause I always knew you as a good man, standing righteous, strong and tall/But here's the chance I never knew you at all"), though by the end she seems to have settled on him having been at least complicit if not actually personally responsible, with repetitions of "Daddy, why?" conveying her hurt and confusion. Meanwhile, "American I.D." finds her battling her own biases on the way toward embracing the differences that built a nation:

I get so angry at my neighbor, on so much we disagree

I decided to surround myself with those who think like me

But all these colors that divide us, all these differences we spite

Maybe form our true foundation, and in the end will seem so slight

Easterling and Kimbrough wisely balance some of the record's historical interests with real immediacy by including a few deeply-felt love songs set wholly in the present, the best of which is "Better." In a gorgeous performance that radiates self-aware strength and vulnerability, Easterling lets a lover in on that most tender of all confessions: "I sleep better in your bed than I do in mine/I look better in your eyes than I do in mine." "One Microphone" (revised in French at the end of the record) discovers a unique stage-based metaphor for love, while "Just Like Flying" is at least slightly more compelling than any song likening being in love to flying has a right to be, though not so good as to keep it from being one of the album's weaker songs.

The finest moment comes with the convergence of the historical and the personal. Easterling tears her way through the album's title track with such indignant energy that you'd presume the song's basis in reality even without knowing the whole back story: The state cut a road through the South Carolina farm that has been in Easterling's family

for more than 200 years, destroying the house built by her great grandfather… then, in an apparently well-intentioned slap in the face, marked the road with the family’s name. The whole situation has Easterling understandably pissed off, so her biting delivery on “Blacktop Road” must have come naturally. Thankfully, she matches the attitude with an eminently well-crafted lyric that artfully invites listeners into the story, such that they’ll be able to get pissed off right along with her. Music as a shared experience.

I’m usually pretty picky about keeping the singer separate from the song, but the clarity and consistency of the narrative voice on BlackTop Road make it difficult to not feel like you’re learning quite a bit about Angela Easterling as a person during the 49 minutes spent under her spell. Above all else, the thing you’ll learn is that, regardless of what may come her way, she’ll be fine. There’s no stopping a talent of this magnitude.

<http://www.countrycalifornia.com/blacktop-road-angela-easterling/>

Article in Savannah Morning News, November 5, 2009 by Emily Goldman

Americana roots musician Angela Easterling thinks music can create a shared experience.

Easterling, who will perform at 7:30 p.m. during this month's First Friday for Folk Music, experienced how people can relate through music after creating her sophomore album's title track "Blacktop Road."

She wrote the song out of frustration, as her family tried to come up with a way to save the land that had been theirs since 1791. As she shared the song with people, Easterling learned her family was not alone in their struggle.

When she performed "Blacktop Road" in Savannah for the same series back in April, she was surprised to see a man in the audience singing along.

"I know he had never heard it before, but he was out there just singing along," Easterling said. "It's really personal but it seems to be something a lot of people have been able to connect with."

Those people and other fans have helped the album - released in July - stay in the top 40 for national air play on the Americana charts for the last seven weeks.

The intensely personal album also includes "Stars Over the Prairie," a song written by her great-grandfather.

"When you tell your story, it makes you realize you are not alone and it makes you feel justified," Easterling said. "I feel blessed to share these stories with audiences and have them appreciate it."

Growing up, Easterling was active in musical theater and thought she would end up on Broadway. But while in college, an Indigo Girls concert changed her mind.

"I just thought, I want to do that," Easterling said after seeing the acoustic duo perform their original music.

The concert inspired her to learn to play the guitar and to write her own music.

"Even before I listened to that kind of music, I always had a roots vibe in what I was doing," Easterling said.

That vibe is still evident, even in her new Franco-Americana project - an American roots album sung in French.

"Writing in another language and singing in another language just opens you up that much more," Easterling said. "There are so many different ways that you can express yourself that might not be available in English."

Easterling studied French in Europe while in college and is working with a professor of French literature.

"I couldn't imagine my music in any other language, but for some reason, French really seems to work," Easterling said. "Maybe its my inner French girl just dying to get out."

Spartanburg Herald-Journal Article by Dan Armonaitis 9-30-09

Upstate native Angela Easterling wasn't sure if she was making the right decision when she chose to move back to Greenville about two-and-a-half years ago.

"After living in Boston and living in Los Angeles, I really thought I was going to be miserable here," Easterling said. "But I've been really happy. Greenville has changed a lot since I was growing up. I think this whole area is kind of a hidden little treasure."

Easterling's homecoming provided the genesis for her recently released album, "Blacktop Road," which is a spectacular slice of folk-laced Americana that details the singer-songwriter's relationship to her maternal family's farm that has stood in Greer since 1791.

Hammett Farm is only a fraction of what it once was, much of it lost years ago to make way for the "Blacktop Road" that Easterling sings about on the blistering title track.

"Even though (the subject matter of the album) is very personal, relating to my family, I've found that it's also very universal," Easterling said. "It seems that every single time that I play the song 'Blacktop Road' at a show, anywhere in the country, I have at least one person in the audience come up and tell me that their family went through the same thing."

The response to the new album -- recorded in Nashville, Tenn., and produced by acclaimed musician Will Kimbrough -- has been overwhelming.

Easterling has reached the Americana Music Association Top 40 chart with it and recently received a glowing endorsement from Byrds' co-founder Roger McGuinn, who called her "a bright shining star on the country/folk/alt.music horizon."

"When the whole thing happened this summer with Roger McGuinn, that was a big sign to me that "OK, I must be doing something right," Easterling said.

Just two weeks ago, Easterling gave a major showcase performance at the Americana Music Festival and Conference in Nashville, where she was pleasantly surprised to have genre stalwart Jim Lauderdale approach her and introduce himself as a fan.

"There's nothing better than having people I look up to like my music," Easterling said. "There's no amount of money that you could make that could add up to a moment like that."

Although Easterling continues to build an impressive national reputation, she said that she's looking forward to headlining this week's installment of the Sonny's Sunday Songwriters series in Spartanburg.

"I actually performed 'Blacktop Road' and 'The Picture' in public for the first time at Sonny's, maybe a week after I had written them," Easterling said. "So, I definitely have a special place in my heart for that gig. As long as I have open dates where I can go play over there, I'm going to do it."

Review in Americana UK (9-08-09)

Angel with wings

There's an innocence in her voice which matches the blond hair and blue eyes perfectly. But there's also an old head on young shoulders in her writing and on some of these tracks she shows that underneath there's a

burning ambition to not be good, but to be great. On songs such as 'Better' there are whispers of an early Emily Saliers in delivery and song style which should be compliment enough.

Although this is just the second full length release there's a personal honesty and splash of life that jumps out of you - helped I'm sure by the band of experienced helpers that add to this well crafted sound. Produced by Will Kimbrough, nothing stands out above her voice but adds balance in the perfect amount. And when she does fall foul of the Nashville clique its done on her terms, on her songs.

'Blacktop Road' could be sung by any New Country Gal, but is not a glorification of life on the road or progress but a pissy, snarling indictment of how this progress destroys memory and lives - think of a new country 'Big Yellow Taxi'. 'American ID' is likewise not afraid of distancing itself from insularity within the good ol' US of A and treats difference as a celebration. 'The Picture' deals with a daughter discovering a photograph of a lynching in the effects of her god-fearing father and doesn't pull any punches in condemnation. It's twin, 'Field of Sorrow' treads a delicate path, dealing with a family separation and feels strangely like Robbie Robertsons wonderful 'Twilight'. 'Big Wide World' is a rollicking hoedown, 'Stars over the Prairie' a delicately delivered ballad written by her grandfather which squares the circle perfectly. The dual treatment on 'One Microphone' and it's French buddy 'Un Microphone' is charming and I'm sure has its own story.

These songs are about place, about family, about belonging and in opposition as much about rebellion, not fitting in, leaving and growth. There have been many false dawns over the years about someone with a bit of guile and craft breaking into the mainstream on their own terms - maybe, just maybe, she has a chance.
Date review added: Tuesday, September 08, 2009

Reviewer: Andrew Williams

<http://www.americana-uk.com>

Review in Vintage Guitar Magazine (will be published in Oct.09 issue)

by Steven Stone

If Steve Earle was reborn as a girl, he'd very likely be Angela Easterling. And Blacktop Road is her Guitar Town . She comes surging out of the chute like a spurred bronco, full of sideways kicks, bucking with all the compressed energy of a coiled steel spring.

Blacktop Road is Easterling's second solo release. She enlisted producer Will Kimbrough, who brought his roots sensibilities, along with guitar and mandolin chops. Anyone with a taste for twang will appreciate Kimbrough's judicious use of old-fashioned plate reverb.

Several of the strongest songs on Blacktop Road address Easterling's family history. Their family farm, settled in 1791, was split in two by a road that the state graciously named after them. The title song examines her less-than-positive view of the proceedings. Instead of a plaintive wail, the tune rocks with the compressed bile reminiscent of Earle's "Copperhead Road". The only cover, Neil Young's "Helpless", demonstrates Easterling's ability to take even a well-known and often-covered tune and give it her own special treatment. Neil, eat your heart out...

Other tunes, such as "The Picture", examine the emotional baggage of being a white Southerner with a tarnished family history in the area of race relations. Easterling's ambivalence toward her family's past makes for poignant songwriting. But her penetrating lyrics would only be political polemic without her enticing melodies. Her "Field of Sorrow" draws from a gospel tradition, while "One Microphone" uses jug-band swing and swagger to get its point across. Easterling's thorough grounding in traditional melodies and song structures supply her tunes with strong foundations so they sound familiar without being boring.

Ten reasons to listen to Angela Easterling:

by Michael Bialas, blogcritics.org, 8-3-09

1. This is a road trip worth taking

BlackTop Road, Easterling's second album (not to be confused with "BlackTop Road," the single), doesn't fall conveniently into any one category, embracing roots rock and comfy country while adding elements of pure pop and righteous folk. There are expressions of sadness ("Field of Sorrow"), frustration (a rousing "Big Wide World") and resentment ("The Picture"). But it also captures what the most endearing moments of a warm family reunion at her longtime South Carolina home might feel like. Eleven of the 13 songs were written by Easterling, yet she reached back into her proud heritage to update her great-grandfather's "Stars Over the Prairie." And she also pays her respects to another familial patriarch in A.P. Carter's Blues, where she's haunted by the spirit of one of country music's founding fathers after visiting his grave.

2. She's an all-Americana girl ...

Easterling will be one of the showcase artists at the 2009 Americana Music Festival to be held September 16-19 at five downtown Nashville venues. She's in pretty good company, too, with Asleep at the Wheel, Cross Canadian Ragweed and Marty Stuart among a long list of performers.

3. ... and Roger McGuinn's latest "Sweetheart"

The jingle-jangle guitarist and founder of the legendary Byrds made Easterling's opening song, "American I.D.," one of his choice cuts on a recent BBC radio show and went on to call her "a bright shining star on the country/folk/alt.music horizon!" and said BlackTop Road (De L'Est Music) "brought me back to the time the Byrds recorded Sweetheart of the Rodeo — tradition meets youthful exuberance!"

4. She sounds like ...

Well, take your pick. Fellow Carolinian (from the North side, though) Tift Merritt would be a good place to start, particularly on the wistful "One Microphone." After a breakup, "those old happy chords sound so blue," sings Easterling, who also provides a French version as a bonus track. But Angela's angelic voice on "Better" and the romantic "Birmingham" also bring to mind Nina Gordon, while there's a hint of feisty Miranda Lambert on the spirited "BlackTop Road." That's covering a lot of ground and range.

5. There's an inner Steve Earle just itching to get out

"BlackTop Road," the single (not to be confused with BlackTop Road, the album) should be the perfect companion piece to Earle's "Copperhead Road" on the Hardcore Troubadour's show for Sirius' Outlaw Country channel. On her personal protest song, an angry Easterling verbally kicks ass as some South Carolina land in her family since the late 18th century is being grabbed by the state for development. With verses like "We cried, 'This can't happen in the USA!' / They said, 'You'd better shut up or we'll take your farm away,'" the song and the singer seem destined for a spot in FarmAid.

6. When's she not writing records ...

An excerpt of a letter this "lifelong Democrat" wrote to Rolling Stone regarding an article titled "The Death Tax"; Scam" was printed in a recent issue, denouncing the inheritance tax and how it's affecting not-so-wealthy property owners everywhere. Easterling's eloquent prose is heartfelt, even in sentences RS

leaves out: "I believe the community is a better place with the historical legacy, old-growth trees and open land preserved, rather than just another Walmart or gas station in its place."

7. Then there's that tweet comedic touch

On Twitter, Easterling took South Carolina scandalous governor Mark Sanford to task even before Letterman and Conan had punch lines prepared for their monologues. Some samples:

• This is a great day for our state! SC just pulled ahead of TX and AK in the most embarrassing Governor competition!

12:56 PM Jun 24th from web

• Haha, Sanford didn't want Obama's stimulus package because he was too busy delivering his own stimulus pkg in Argentina!

12:40 PM Jun 24th from web

Easterling also recently posted this twitpic taken of her with Earle, commenting, I have to laugh b/c we both look so jolly and both sing about such miserable stuff, LOL :)

8. Who's her "Daddy"?

Brilliant guitarist Will Kimbrough has worked with everyone from Rodney Crowell to Jimmy Buffett to Allison Moorer, and currently runs a band with Tommy Womack called Daddy. He and Easterling aren't really related, but the Alabaman produced her album and plays just about everything on it, including mandolin, banjo, dobro, piano and, of course, acoustic and electric guitars. Easterling adds acoustic guitar throughout while accomplished musicians such as Fats Kaplin (fiddle, accordion, among others), Al Perkins (pedal steel) and Anne McCue (lead guitar on "BlackTop Road," lap steel) are also major players in this well-rounded instrumental cast.

9. Young love for Neil Young

Covering the Canadian who made country cool must be a prerequisite for up-and-coming musicians seeking to graduate with honors from the school of songwriting. Fortunately, Easterling's rendition of "Helpless"; isn't overproduced, relying mainly on her plaintive vocals and a solid bass line. It fits right in with other recent low-key renditions of Young classics performed by Holly Williams ("Birds") and the Cowboy Junkies ("Don't Let It Bring You Down").

10. She's mad about Mad Men

The terrific Emmy- and Golden Globe-winning television show about ad

men, their wives and their often miserable lives set in New York City during the stylish Sixties returns for its third season on August 16, and Easterling wants to be on it. She's urging fans to choose her during an open casting call at amctv.com that runs until August 11.

If anybody deserves to go back in time, it's this sweet Southern bella donna. So stop, look and listen up. If you want to make your vote count, just pretend you're picking the next Americana idol.

<http://blogcritics.org/music/article/music-review-angela-easterling-blacktop-road/>

Great music from Angela Easterling
By Rick Cornell, July 2009 Country Standard Time

Album: BlackTop Road

Home: Greenville, SC

Musical Influences: Emmylou Harris, Johnny Cash, Indigo Girls, Neil Young, the Carter Family, Judy Garland

Bio: Angela Easterling first left her South Carolina home to attend college in Boston and later for a couple-of-year stint in Los Angeles, but she's back and living not far from the family farm located in Greer. "We always go out and explore, and we always come back," Easterling says of her family, adding with a laugh. "Then we leave again but keep coming back."

On her most recent return, Easterling thought she was coming back only temporarily, but she's ended up making the Greenville area her base of operations. "If there's anyplace in this world where I can call home," she says, "it's that land in Greer."

And it's that piece of land that's at the heart of Easterling's second album, "BlackTop Road," its title track telling the story of the family farm and its struggle against "progress" manifested in pavement. There are other personal moments on the album, whether firsthand (A.P. Carter Blues was inspired by a trip to the titular patriarch's grave, while Stars Over the Prairie revisits a song written by her great-grandfather in the '40s) or borrowed (The Picture details a harrowing discovery a daughter makes after the death of her father). And in the voice of Easterling and the hands of her and producer Will Kimbrough - along with top-flight guests like Ken Coomer, Dave Jacques, Fats Kaplin, Anne McCue and Al Perkins - the songs get the loving, and often rocking, treatment they deserve.

CST's Take: Lovely (and theater-trained) vocals, penetrating songs, and a restless heart that always finds its way back home with stories to tell.

Country Standard Time: I hear a strong sense of place in your songs, whether it's cities like Copenhagen, Birmingham, Nashville, and L.A., or it's the mountains or a farm. Can you talk about that aspect of your songwriting?

Angela Easterling: I've been spending a lot of time these days on the road, so a lot of these are coming from my own specific journeys and specific experiences. There's the specific experience I had in Copenhagen (American I.D.). I wrote that song, Just Like Flying, on the plane from Nashville to L.A. So some of those are just literal and specific. Birmingham, I have to confess, was not. That song I wrote about coming back home to where I'm from, which is Greenville, S.C., but it just didn't sound very good. (laughs) So I chose Birmingham. I don't know if I've ever even been to Birmingham. I hope that doesn't ruin the experience of listening to the song, but Birmingham sounded a lot more evocative....The song about our farm, that's very specific too. That song is about our farm; it's a real place, and it's about what my family has been going through. The picture on the cover of my CD was taken out in front of our farm, in the road that I wrote BlackTop Road about.

CST: There's also a strong sense of character, but it's not coming from story songs in the traditional sense. It really comes from first person, although you're not always the "I" that's in the song. How tough is writing from that perspective? I'm thinking about The Picture in particular, an especially powerful song.

AE: Thank you. Well, that song I felt like it had to be first person even though it's not from my point of view. I felt like it had to be first person to be meaningful, to be powerful. I felt like if I was talking about someone else and her father, it wouldn't hit with the same amount of emotional gravity of the situation. With that song, the idea of saying "her" or "her father" or making it not in the first person, that was never even an option. From the moment I had the idea to do that song, I knew it had to be first person. The same with Field of Sorrow, which is another first-person song, from the point of view of a dead girl looking back at her family. I thought that was the same kind of thing, giving the song an emotional gravity, an emotional weight, to make it more personal.

CST: Was The Picture based on something you read or heard? I swear I read an account a couple years ago about a woman who found letters in her attic that revealed her father had been a member of the Ku Klux Klan, but I couldn't find it when I looked today.

AE: Oh wow. Just in general, my aunt told me a story of a friend of hers whose father had passed, and she'd found some things like that. So, that's what started my brain to working. The concept was something that I'd been wanting to write about for years, but I hadn't really found a way inside it. I hadn't really found an angle. I wanted to write about these after-effects of our history, how it still affects us to this day whether we want to admit it or not. But I didn't know how to write about it without sounding trite. (starts singing) "Oh now I'm going to sing about racism." I wanted to find a way to write about it that was going to be compelling. When I heard of this, I thought "Well, I'll just tell this story." And it's a story about a father and a daughter, but it happens to be this American story. And have to say that this is probably something that happens every day in this country. It's probably not an isolated incident.

CST: In the liner notes for "BlackTop Road," you write about the family farm and how your grandparents worked the farm while also holding other jobs. That kind of struck a chord with me because, and this is purely speculative, with your writing and your performing you seem rooted in your rural upbringing, but still trying to experience what the rest of the world has to offer.

AE: Oh yeah, and that's how my grandparents were too. My grandfather was a farmer all his life, but he graduated from Furman University when he was only 19 years old with a degree in chemistry. He spoke fluent French. He read the Bible every day in French so he could maintain his fluency. Like many men of his generation, he went to Europe in World War 2, but he went back many other times in his life. He traveled to Africa. My grandmother traveled to Israel five times, three of the times by herself. And this was in the last 10 years of her life. Every other year, she would go to Israel, and she'd save the money to go to Israel by doing her neighbors' sewing and making quilts. My grandfather's sister lived in Africa for most of her life as a nurse. Yet, everyone always came back to this place. The family that I come from is a very worldly and educated family, but were are rooted to this place. It's like a magnet that draws us back.

CST: In addition to your writing, your singing is obviously a major drawing card. What are your earliest memories of singing, and do you remember the first time you got paid to sing?

AE: Let's see. I grew up singing in church, but obviously I didn't get paid to sing in church. From a young age, I really loved to sing, and I loved to perform. Even to this day, one of my favorite singers is Judy Garland, but especially when I was little. I used to watch all her movies when I was a little kid, and I wanted to be just like her. And I also liked Julie Andrews. I grew up doing musical theater and then started writing my own songs when I was in college. Maybe the first time I got paid to sing might have been my freshman year in college, when I played my first show out. I'm sure I didn't get paid any much more than tips, but I'm sure I appreciated it. (laughs) To this day, I can't believe I get paid to do what I love for a living. I'm not rolling in dough or anything yet, but the fact that I can buy my groceries and gas and everything and pay for my cat's cat food by singing is pretty amazing. I definitely grew up not with country or folk music or anything like that. I listened to old musical theater and singers like that, and I went to college and majored in musical theater, so I had a lot of vocal training. But when I started writing songs, it was funny because people said to me, "Oh, you write country songs." And I was like, "What? I don't even listen to country music." I knew Johnny Cash, and that was it. So I started listening to Emmylou Harris and stuff like that and started writing more in that vein. But then when I went to record, it sounded like Julie Andrews trying to sing country music. (laughs)

CST: I'm always interested in why artists choose to cover the songs that they do. Of all the songs out there - and all the Neil Young songs - what made you decide to record Helpless?

AE: That's one that I've been doing in my live shows over the last couple of years. It started as a fluke. I was doing this songwriter night with these guys up in New Hampshire a couple years ago, and they were like, "What are some songs that we can all jam on?" I suggested Helpless, and they said "Okay, you sing it." I'd never thought about singing it. But it ended up sounding so good that

we must have played the same song for 15 minutes. Afterwards, the lady came up to me and bought two of my CDs, and she said she wasn't going to buy my CDs until she heard me do Helpless. (laughs) Which I don't know if that's so much of a compliment, but I thought, "Wow, I'm going to start singing that at all of my shows."

<http://www.countrystandardtime.com/d/column.asp?xid=327>

Country Standard Time review by Rick Cornell 8/09

When Angela Easterling prepared to record her sophomore record, her wish list for producers had one name in bold: Will Kimbrough. "We seem to have a very similar vocabulary musically," Easterling says of the Nashville Underground hero. "Plus, he has a firm foothold in a rock sound." Kimbrough ended up signing on, and, sure enough, "BlackTop Road" rocks the rock and talks the talk - and does so eloquently.

Some of that eloquence no doubt stems from the bulk of Easterling's songwriting being drawn directly from her own experiences, with the title track detailing the struggles of a farm that's been in her family for more than 200 years while the introspective leadoff cut American I.D. dissects her wanderlust. She can work outside of her own sphere of influence though: the penetrating pair of The Picture and Field of Sorrow were inspired by a secondhand story and the novel The Lovely Bones respectively. Things definitely do get louder this time out, with the roots-rock hooks of American I.D. and Birmingham and the righteous jangle of One Microphone calling out for immediate attention. But quieter numbers like A.P. Carter's Blues and Stars Over the Prairie - the latter a revisiting of a song her great-grandfather wrote in the '40s - suggest that Easterling's about as likely to relinquish that part of her musical personality as she is to forsake the family farm. And holding down the middle of the record is an adventurous and strikingly confident take on Helpless. Those looking to connect some dots might recall that Kimbrough once wrote a song titled Neil Young for his band Will & the Bushmen. Yep, similar vocabularies.

<http://www.countrystandardtime.com/d/cdreview.asp?xid=4261>

From 'BlackTop Road' to Ardmores MilkBoy

Wednesday, June 24, 2009

By Craig Ostroff

Managing Editor

The price of progress can often be the loss of history.

In Greer, S.C., the fastest-growing area in the state, land is being taken by the state to make room for development.

And for singer-songwriter Angela Easterling, it's a very personal subject. Because not only has she seen open space and green lands sacrificed for "progress" in her hometown, but she's also watched it happen to her family's farm.

"Family farms are such an important part of the heritage of our country," Easterling said in a recent telephone interview. "Part of what this country was founded on was people having their own property and being able to do what they want with it and not having someone come along and take it away from you because they feel like they have a better use for it."

"It's always surprising to me, with all we know about how we need to conserve and be green and hold onto the land, how people seem to think if there's open land, you're hindering progress. It surprises me so many people still feel that land is not worthwhile unless there's a building on it or a house on it or a Walmart on it."

To do her part in drawing attention to the plight of not only the Hammett Farm (which dates back to 1791), but also similar farms across the country, Easterling penned "BlackTop Road," an all-too-true story of a family farm dismantled piece by piece by those who felt it was standing in the way of progress.

"When I was a little kid, it was all farms," Easterling said of the area. "Now when you drive around, it's like our farm is in the middle of a suburb. It's the only open land left, and everybody wants to build something on it. It's something that's going to be a struggle every year."

"Every year my aunt has to go to the zoning commission and petition to be kept agricultural zone, because they want to rezone it as a residential area, build houses and apartments there."

"Ironically, all these apartment buildings and complexes in the area have our family name on them. There's even a condo complex called Hammett Farms, which I think is ironic, because everybody is trying to get the actual Hammetts out of there."

Even the cover of her sophomore CD, also titled "BlackTop Road," strikes a different chord than the soft, bright colors of her debut, "Earning Her Wings." The cover of "BlackTop Road";

features Easterling standing on the very road that the government widened by taking land from the family farm (that's the Hammett Farm on the right side of the photo), with Easterling standing under a cold, dark sky, looking defiantly straight ahead, suitcase in hand and mandolin case at her feet.

"That's me holding my ground," Easterling said of the photo. "Inside [the CD package] there are several pictures of my family, in the same places where I am in my pictures. I wanted to give people a feeling that this is real, this is my family. I'm not standing here in front of a barn to be cute; my great-grandfather built this barn, my grandfather built this barn.

"I felt like in this album I needed to be staring straight at the camera; I'm facing all the things in my life, face them head-on."

And she does just that. If "Earning Her Wings" announced Easterling's arrival, "BlackTop Road" shows that she's here to stay. Easterling handles soul-searching topics fearlessly and gracefully, weaving stories that entrance as much by her warm, inviting voice as by her heartfelt lyrics.

The album opens with "American I.D.," an inquiry into where we fit into the American melting pot when we seem to do little else but cling to our differences. Written in 2004, Easterling said she only felt comfortable singing it in the last several years.

"I wrote it for myself — I was trying to figure out where was my place in this country, where do I belong here?" she said. "Am I an American even though I feel this way about this thing? What is it that ties me to other people in America when we're so disagreeing on things that seem so fundamentally important? I think, in a way, that song was kind of like a pleading to feel like I belong here, trying to find what I have in common with other people, what makes us Americans.

"I found that what we have in common is so much more than what divides us. The things we have in common, the agreement we have to live together in a democracy — a lot of countries can't do that. We're a country of dreamers and people who follow their dreams. We come from all over the place, and for the most part, we do live in peace."

Easterling also touches on racism and its place in American history in "The Picture," a haunting melody about a woman (a friend of Easterling's aunt) who finds a photograph in her recently deceased father's belongings, how it changes everything she thought she knew about her father and how she tries to explain it to herself.

“This

was something I wanted to write about because I feel like it’s a part of our history,” Easterling said. “People just don’t want to look at it, ‘lt’s all over, it only happened back then, it doesn’t have anything to do with me,’ and I don’t think that’s true. I think the things that happened in our past, they affect us more than we want to admit.

“It’s deeply personal, yet it relates to everyone. As you go through her thought process, her first impulse is to destroy the evidence, but she realizes that doesn’t change anything. Her second impulse is to rationalize, to make excuses. But the truth is she’ll never know.

“Some of my ancestors owned slaves, some didn’t. Some fought for the North, some fought for the South. You want to go back and ask them why. ‘How on earth could you have ever felt like this was the right thing to do?’ And if I descend from this person, does it make me a bad person? How does this relate to my identity, knowing this history? That’s what I was getting at in a larger context. I think we need to talk about these things — there can’t really be any reconciliation until people are honest about what happened.”

But

“BlackTop Road” isn’t all serious and solemn. Far from it, in fact. As she did on her previous album, Easterling includes a tribute to a country music legend (“A.P. Carter’s Blues”), a song written by an ancestor (“Stars over the Prarie,” written by her great-grandfather), love songs and a good old-fashioned romp (“Big Wide World”).

“I’m

at that time in my life where everything I’ve been going through, being on the road, everything [her family] has gone through these last few years, that’s really what I felt I had to write about,” Easterling said. “That’s just what struck my fancy. But my whole life isn’t just sitting around thinking about all the bad things in the world. Very little of it is.

“I look at writing an album as almost like writing a book — each song is a chapter; they have to kind of work together. And this album has songs that are uplifting and positive.”

Easterling,

who played to a very appreciative, packed MilkBoy Coffee last March will return to the venue June 28 for an 8 p.m. show that will feature tunes from her debut album as well as from “BlackTop Road,” which will be released July 14 (visit Easterling’s MySpace page at www.myspace.com/angelaeeasterling or her Web site www.angelaeeasterling.com for ordering information), during a tour that will see her play more than 20 (and counting) dates up and down the East Coast through August.

“Playing

live, that’s why I do this,” Easterling said. “I love performing. And I love sharing the songs with people. When you put a song out in front of a crowd, that’s when you give them a life.”

And though there may be darker songs on her latest album, Easterling assures that her show will be just as fun and energetic as it was the last time she visited.

“I

am a very happy, positive, upbeat person. I tell the stories behind some of these songs, especially ‘BlackTop Road,’ and that song is very angry and it makes me angry, but I’m certainly not angry the whole show. I try to give each song what it requires. The show will still be fun and upbeat and lively.”

June 22, 2009 Twangnation.com:

"If you want an excellent example of what Americana, that 5 layer-dip of genres, has to offer you need to just put on Angela Easterling’s new release Blacktop Road. Easterling delivers neo-trad country, folk and rock in her earnestly melancholic voice betraying her Greenville, S.C. roots, and her expanded tastes and sensibilities that might have been cultivated by her stretch in L.A. She sounds like she’d be right at home in a honky-tonk or a New York supper club.

Blacktop Road was produced by Will Kimbrough (Todd Snider, Rodney Crowell, Kate Campbell, Jimmy Buffett) and the album reflects his good sense to not burden it with studio wizardry.

Easterling has the goods and needs little more than a mic (though here she has a crack band – Al Perkins, Fats Kaplin, Ken Coomer, Anne McCue and Dave Jacques, along with Kimbrough – backing her) to get the job done. whether it’s John Mellencamp or Steve Earle style roots rocking on American I.D., a mid-tempo piece about American multiculturalism and self-identity and the title cut (not a cover of the Lost Trailers crappy song by the same name) decrying the encroaching suburban sprawl and the loss of a rural way of life.

American identity is again addressed in the The Picture about a woman’s relationship with her father and his involvement in the Jim Crow South. For all braying about social messages in contemporary country music they are like crayon scribbling compared to finely crafted song like this.

Better is a beautifully aching

hillbilly-chamber piece featuring mandolin, dobro, cello and violin (not fiddle) as a backdrop for longing for the comfort of a loved one. AP Carter's Blues continues the bittersweet tone and offers a fine tribute to the Carter family patriarch with excellent pedal steel accompaniment by Fats Kaplin.

The cover of Neil Young's Helpless is done similarly as the original's slow, woeful simmering manner that fits the song to a T without being done by rote. Stars Over The Prairie is wonderfully spirited is A Western Swing shuffle reworking of a song penned by her great-grandfather in the 40s.

Easterling's first offering, 2007's Earning Her Wings, was an excellent first release, and with Blacktop Road she advances her skills and confidence and has provided us a great Summer soundtrack." www.twangnation.com

Posted on Fri, Dec. 18, 2009

Easterling's star is rising
By OTIS R. TAYLOR JR.

otaylor@thestate.com

Angela
Easterling, who will perform at The Opulent 'Possum on Saturday night, is far down the "Black Top Road" from where she was this time last year.

She released her second album, "Black Top Road," in July. The album has been praised in Oxford American and Country Weekly.

- The record spent several weeks in the American top 40, rare for an independent.

- Easterling was named a 2009 Kerrville New Folk Finalist.

- Roger McGuinn of the Byrds, called her "a bright shining star on the horizon."

-
She recently appeared alongside Charlie Louvin, a former member of the Louvin Brothers and a country music hall of famer who played at The White Mule in November, on Nashville's WSM 650-AM, which broadcasts "Grand Ole Opry."

Easterling has more shows booked and more name recognition. To her busy tour schedule this year, she added radio dates. Yes, radio is still important for breaking a performer.

"A lot of times, just getting them in there to give you a chance is such a battle," Easterling said. "Because they get so much. One of the biggest battles is just getting them to listen to it."

"So when my next album comes out, a lot of these people will remember me."

But she wants more, which is why she isn't taking a holiday break.

"You're not going from nobody to Beyonce-level of success if you're working in this indie music," Easterling said. "You're always a snowball."

"(Taking a break is the) worst thing you can do in this business. Because once people forget about you, you're invisible."

But it's the week before Christmas?

"I will take time off at some point," she said. "I don't take time off on purpose. I'm not that good at taking time off. For me, the most relaxing time is when I'm on the road."

"Because if I have a show every night, I will give myself time to relax during the day."

Easterling is the kind of songwriter whose songs sweep at the world like a broom on a country porch: You can't get it all, but you get enough. Her songs seek a deeper meaning, and satisfaction for the songs' characters isn't always guaranteed.

Her hard work promoting her music is paying off. Or is that paying back? She compared the life of an independent musician to that of a restaurant owner.

"At some point, you hope you're getting more money in than you're putting out," said Easterling, who self-financed "Black Top Road." "I just feel really lucky and blessed that my CD was received well. It was a risk, especially with the way the economy is."

Easterling is already thinking ahead to the next albums, including one in French.

"I don't know if I'm going to do it before my next album or do it at the same time," she said. "I just finished writing a new song in French a couple of days ago."

Why French?

"For me, there are some things I can express better in French than I can do in English," Easterling said. "It's just a different flavor in your mouth."

"That'll be down the road a while. I'm going to ride on the coattails of 'Black Top Road.' Make some of that money back before I go spend some more."

Saturday's show at The Opulent 'Possum, a house concert where all are welcomed with a smile, will have the warmth and spirit of the holiday season: good people joining each other for good times.

It'll be work for Easterling, but it will be fun, too. That much hasn't changed on the road she's on.

"It's still one of my favorite things to do," she said about house shows. "As long as there's people there I can play to."

Monday, June 15, 2009

"Angela Easterling, we now know, is a quietly plaintive singer who rewards attentive listening. Her *Blacktop Road*, with its mandolins, dobros, lap steels, peddle steels, fiddles, etc., is out-and-out "alt. country," a genre no longer in vogue but still kicking. A lot of the songs here sound like they've been around for years—;that's a compliment—;including the sweetly yearning cover of a certain Wannabe Southern Man's "Helpless." Produced by the agile and sensitive Will Kimbrough." *Oxford American*

June 29, 2009 *Direct Current Music.com*:

"This is a very personal album for me," says Angela Easterling of her sophomore July 14 full-length *BlackTop Road*.

"There is so much of my family in it. The themes are family and home and looking for a home. I think there is also a theme of where the past, present and future intersect and have an effect on each other. Sometimes it seems like the future is trying to destroy the past. But we can't escape the past; it still haunts us."

The "back to roots" attitude that Easterling brings to her fine new project transcends any casual lipservice. To dig deep into her own 18th century South Carolina roots, the singer/songwriter returned home and began to explore the themes, musical traditions and ancestral connections that have affected not just her own persona but generations of her own family tree. Working with producer Will Kimbrough (Todd Snider, Kate Campbell), Easterling expanded her sound, a blend of what Kimbrough describes as "rock-n-roll, country, bluegrass, literature and French pop." Fiddles and banjos trade space with slide guitar and some charged honkytonk rhythms for an album that has one foot firmly planted in the traditional southern music, the other in the modern interpretations of Americana. It's a balancing act that blossoms on track such as the wistful slow-dance ballad "Just Like Flying", charming French twanger "Un Microphone" and jukebox raver title track. Recommended."

Smart Choice Music (UK) July 14, 2009:

Angela Easterling won the SCM 'album of the year' award at the end of 2006 for her CD *Earning Her Wings* - and became our very first 'Enjoy This CD or get your money back' offer, so impressed were we with the CD. 2009 sees the release of her follow-up *Blacktop Road*, an equally impressive sophomore release.

Blacktop Road has moved Angela's standing as an artist forward significantly - produced by Will Kimbrough, the CD features an A-List lineup of musicians including Al Perkins, Fats Kaplin, Ken Coomer, Anne McCue and Dave Jacques, and displays a more personal writing approach. Where her last album was observational, with tales of characters set in short stories, the subject matter on the new CD clearly comes more from the heart, and the material is consequently even more striking.

Blacktop Road is again full of catchy hooks, and memorable tunes, with Angela's pure, clear and unadorned voice rising above the jangling guitars and alt.country rhythms. Roger McGuinn picked the anthemic opener, *American ID* to play as one of his choice cuts on a recent BBC radio slot, and the Byrds-esqe feel of this track does set the tone for the CD.

There is less 'country' than on *Earning Her Wings*, but the folksy approach of tracks like *One Microphone* keep Angela firmly in touch with her roots.

Highly recommended release from one of our favourite artists ~ SCM

Thursday, June 11, 2009

Tug Baker, Free Times, Columbia:

Angela Easterling has just about the prettiest voice to come out of the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. While the folk songstress claims Emmylou Harris as an influence (and wears it quite well), there's also a spark of youth in her voice more reminiscent of someone with a rock background, like Jenny Lewis. Easterling's voice and her songwriting talents are most apparent on slower, folk numbers, but she can also knock out an Appalachian rocker that sounds like early Steve Earle, such as the title track from her album *Black Top Road*.

A short walk with Angela Easterling Otis R. Taylor Jr., The State

Angela Easterling was in town on Tuesday to sketch out the West Columbia Riverwalk Amphitheater, the place she'll play Saturday night as part of the Rhythm on the River series.

I met her nearby on State Street.

We walked down the amphitheater's concrete steps and past the stage. We kept walking - following the riverside trail to Sunset Boulevard.

It wasn't an interview, so I didn't record our conversation. Since I've interviewed her several times before, it was nice to chat without an objective.

Just walk.

And talk.

The Boston Red Sox, Southern living, L.A. heat, the road and drinking on the road. I've been interested in her detailed lyrics since seeing her at The Opulent & Possum more than a year ago.

Easterling is a person who wonders and wanders. She's going to release a French album and then tour France. She still believes in Big Papi. She still believes in love.

And people.

When I put her new record
“Black Top Road,” due out July 14, in the CD player after our
conversation, I felt more moved than before.

Especially when “The Picture,” an open letter to her character's father, played. On it she sounds angry,
lost, impassioned.

“Daddy, why’d you have that picture / Of that black man in the tree?,” she sings to begin the somber
and softly-strummed song.

“Were you too young to make a difference?,” she asks, as if the hurt and confusion inside her will burst.

But, like most of her work, she’s in control, and she articulates her feelings better than most.

I
didn’t question her about this song, even when she asked me what I
thought about the album. My imagination hadn’t fully wrapped around the
song.

I just wanted to get back to the car and hear it again after we had iced tea at House Coffee.

Easterling is a songwriter who makes listeners feel, think and see.

The world can be ugly, but somehow her voice can make anything softer, easier to manage. Harsh stories have beauty.

It took a walk - and another listen - to understand how she’s able to do just that.

Angela Easterling

by : Kevin Oliver, Free Times, Columbia, SC

Issue #22.19 :: 05/13/2009 - 05/19/2009

This Greenville musician had to go to Boston, then Los Angeles,
before discovering her musical roots lay in the folk, country and roots
music of her native South. Easterling released a nearly country album
while in L.A., but her upcoming disc Black Top Road treads a more rock
‘n’ roll path courtesy of producer Will Kimbrough (who’s manned the
board for Todd Snider), guitarist Ann McCue and other guests. The title
track is a rootsy rave-up that chronicles the threatened development of

her family's farm, and it earned her a finalist spot in this year's New Folk songwriting competition at the Kerrville Folk Festival. Call or email for reservations and directions. (And check out this interview with Easterling.) see below:

Somewhere in my boxes of old local music is a copy of a record that Greenville native Angela Easterling recorded when she was barely out of her teens and playing in coffeehouses. One can almost hear her wince when reminded of that initial effort during a recent phone call.

"Nobody tells you then that if you record something it will still be around years later," Easterling says. "That was my first attempt at recording and it was mostly just me and another guitarist, very acoustic and very simple. I'm not sure I even have a copy of it any more."

Easterling has come a long way from those humble beginnings. After attending college in Boston, she headed west.

"Emerson College had an internship program in Los Angeles, so I spent a year there during school and went back after graduation," Easterling says. "The weather's perfect and it's like a bigger version of Atlanta to me, just really spread out."

It was the musical connections she made there that shaped her first proper album, *Earning Her Wings*.

"I made a lot of great friends, and there was a good alt-country scene out there that I got into," Easterling says. "That's part of why that album has such an old country sound to it."

That classic country sound had writers comparing her to everyone from Lucinda Williams to Loretta Lynn, but Easterling draws inspiration from more diverse sources, something that she says will be better reflected on her upcoming disc *Black Top Road*.

“It’s funny, but even though I recorded the new album in Nashville, it is much less country sounding,” she says. “These newer songs are more complex as far as subject matter, too.”

Easterling used noted guitar-slinger and Todd Snider sideman Will Kimbrough to produce the new material, and she says he added more than just experience to the process.

“Will is so creative he can do anything, play anything, and he just brings an open mind and amazing ability,” Easterling says. “He also brought in people like Fats Kaplin, Al Perkins, [ex-Wilco drummer] Ken Coomer and [John Prine sideman] David Gates to play on the songs, so they sound great.”

Easterling says her aim with the new material is to become an artist like her own inspirations: Emmylou Harris and Neil Young.

“Emmylou does all these different songs, from the Carter Family to the Beatles to Merle Haggard, but it all consistently sounds like her,” Easterling says. “Neil Young, he’s a major influence on this album, I think. It’s definitely a more singer-songwriter album.”

The title track is a reference to her family’s farm in Greer, which is threatened with the pace of nearby development and growth. In her family since 1791, the Hammett Farm does indeed now have a blacktop road running in front of it, but Easterling and the rest of her extended family are fighting to keep further development away from the property, which is still a working farm business.

In preparation for the upcoming album release, Easterling has assembled a full touring band of Upstate area musicians including hotshot guitarist Brandon Turner, who also plays regularly with Spartanburg’s Fayssoux McLean (who, coincidentally, was an early associate of Harris’s).

“I’ve been touring solo a lot the past few years, just because it makes more sense financially,” Easterling says. “I’m getting a few more gigs regionally now, and with the new album it seemed like it was time to put a group together for some of them. I just played my first shows with the band last week, including an outdoors festival set. Brandon started taking solos and I just let him go off, because the more he solos the better I look.”

This week’s house concert will be a solo performance, but watch your calendars for a full band set by Easterling in June at the Rhythm on the River concert series in Cayce.

Friday, May 15, 2009

On the Scene: A musical echo from the family farm by Otis Taylor (The State)

BLACK TOP MUSIC: The barn was knocked down without warning. Trees were chopped, and tar was poured.

The farm land owned by the Hammett family of Greer is slowly being annexed by the state for residential homes along Hammett Bridge Road.

"There's even a complex called Hammett Farms," said Angela Easterling, who will perform at the Alien Carnival House Saturday.

Easterling, a furtive songwriter who injects country, bluegrass and soul into her music, will release her new CD, "Black Top Road," in July. The title track is a stomper about her family's fight to preserve the farm — and the state's unwillingness to pay for the land.

"After a year of court battles, we were finally paid for the land," she said. "There wasn't anything we could do to stop them from building the road.

"It was about the way we were treated."

The punctured economy has provided a silver lining: It has slowed the housing market in Greer.

"It's just going to be an ongoing situation because we want to keep our land," Easterling said. "Our trees provide air, and they're something to look out at other than rows and rows of houses."

Easterling isn't all fire on the CD. For instance, there's "Just Like Flying," a lilting story about love and flight that features famed Nashville guitarist and dobro player Al Perkins. The song was written on a flight to L.A., where Easterling lived for several years — and fell in love with country music.

"When I thought of country music, I thought about Garth Brooks," she said. "I didn't know the old stuff. And definitely not the alt-country stuff like Lucinda Williams."

"Black Top Road" was recorded in Nashville by Will Kimbrough. (Select songs are streaming at www.myspace.com/easterling.)

Easterling's songwriting has earthy and ethereal qualities, which are hyper-realized in an intimate setting like a house show. And the songs have earned her a place as a finalist in the 2009 Kerrville Folk Festival new folk songwriting competition.

"That is a really big deal," said Easterling, who will be driving to Texas next week for the festival. "It's definitely a big honor. I'm thrilled to be a part of it."

The evening starts at 5:30 p.m., with the music at 7:30 p.m. Bring a covered dish and adult beverages. \$15; (803) 413-5676 for reservations and directions.

<http://www.thestate.com/entertain-index/story/786544.html>

"Easterling tussles her country ballads as if they were hair, leaving the strands sweetly knotted. Her voice can be a soaring falsetto or a raspy whirl. She's not your usual country girl and, for her music's sake, her attitude is very welcome."
-Otis Taylor, The State (Pick of the Week)

"On 'Earning Her Wings', ANGELA EASTERLING takes a more traditional pop country stance (think Loretta Lynn meets Barbara Mandrell) that is full of fiddles, pedal steel guitar, twang and some heavy emoting. From the fun 'Feel Like Drinking' to the somber 'Dear Johnny', Angela invites you to the hoedown. Her voice is airy and fits the style like a sheath. Enjoyable from beginning to end. Angela has her finger (and voice) on the pulse of the style. The final cut is a rollicking cover of 'When I Wake Up and Sleep No More', with more than a hint of gospel handclapping sing-along. Yeah, I liked this one."
-Robert Barr

"The South Carolina native allows her varied roots to shine through on this excellent release. Conjuring up images of both Saturday night frolic and Sunday morning redemption, Easterling has created an enchanting brand of neo-traditionalist country that mixes hard-edged honky tonk with fetching ballads. Her voice is a gorgeous instrument, capable of extracting nuances from a wide range of country-oriented material."

Songs like the Carter Family-inspired 'River Jordan', the moving 'Long, Gone, True' and the yearning title track evoke the elemental allure of her Appalachian roots. Easterling further taps into her heritage on the old-time gospel sing-along 'When I Wake Up To Sleep No More', a 60-year-old song written by a distant relative. Balancing the album's mountain sensibility are some terrific honky-tonk numbers that bring to mind such classic performers as Jean Shepard and Rose Maddox. Of note are the steel guitar-driven 'Feel Like Drinking', the rockabilly-flecked 'Toy' and the spry 'Truck-Driving Man'.

Country fans who like music with deep roots might want to check this one out."

Local houses double as performance venues
By OTIS R. TAYLOR JR. - otaylor@thestate.com

Jeff Blake/jblake@thestate.com

Singer/songwriter Angela Easterling performs at the Opulent 'Possum, a house that frequently doubles as an intimate concert venue.

She speaks fondly of her grandfather's farm, the land she roamed as a child.

Some of those acres are now being plowed to make room for grocery stores and housing developments, chipping away the childhood Angela Easterling remembers.

"They've got telephone poles where our trees had been," Easterling says of the land in Greer.

She wrote a song about her feelings — "Black-top Road" — a swaying lament that's as sad as it is beautiful.

The audience on a recent summer evening listens to every word; the only sound besides the music is the croaking of frogs.

Performers don't get this kind of attention in a bar, where Jager bombs, big-screen TVs and pool tables are distractions. There, singer-songwriters are background noise. But at house shows like this one, they are the focus.

Easterling, in a floral print sundress and gold wedge sandals, stands under a pergola in Kelly and Ben Lovejoy's backyard. The Lovejoys host concerts once a month at their Lower Richland home.

The Opulent 'Possum, as the Lovejoys call it, is one of a handful of local houses that double as performance venues. They are part of a growing national circuit that hosts singer-songwriters in living rooms, basements and backyards.

"You have this captive audience," says Fran Snyder, a singer-songwriter and creator of Concerts In Your Home, a Web site of house-show resources (concertsinyourhome.com).

"You have this host who really takes pride in your success. If they have a low turnout, they're more upset than you are."

About 30 people are at the Lovejoys' to hear Easterling sing. Some even banter with her from their seats on the split-level deck.

"You sound like Loretta Lynn," someone says after "Dear Johnny," an open letter to Johnny Cash off Easterling's 2007 CD, "Earning Her Wings."

"Thanks," she says. "If she wants to sing it, that's fine with me. Dixie Chicks, anybody. It would pay for gas for a month."

A swell of laughter.

"How are we doing on time?" Easterling asks.

"It's up to you" is the response.

'YOU FEEL LIKE YOU KNOW THEM'

Jimmy Riddle booked his first house concert almost 20 years ago. Several people who currently host house shows say he started the trend in Columbia.

"I was living in an apartment on Confederate Avenue, and I was able to fit 32 people," says Riddle, 42, of the 1989 show that featured David Wilcox.

"I charged \$10 and needed to make \$400. I ate some of that."

Wilcox became the first in a long line of performers who played Riddle's living room. After completing his residency at USC, Riddle, a psychiatrist with the S.C. Department of Mental Health, moved to a house on Senate Street.

He needed a bigger venue as his shows grew in popularity.

"I bought the house because I wanted to do house concerts," he says. "Most of (the performers) stayed at my house.

"They could stay until the next show if they wanted — and some of them did."

Riddle says he owes his love of acoustic music to Greenstreets, the former Five Points club that was the closest thing Columbia had to a true listening room in the past 20 years.

Uncle Gram, a WUSC DJ who took Riddle's place on the house concert circuit, has fond memories of Greenstreets, too.

"People came there to listen," he says. "We need something like that. The coffeehouses aren't working because they're selling coffee and desserts."

House concerts have helped fill the void.

Uncle Gram, who by day is a truck driver named Mark Lyvers, began hosting the Red Bank Bar and Grill House Concert Series on Mother's Day 2004.

Give folks a better experience than they'd have at a bar, he says, and they'll come back.

"I really try to make my guests comfortable. I meet them at the door, get a chance to chat and get to know the artist.

"By the time they get to the stage, you feel like you know them."

Gram has hosted well-traveled folk and Americana performers such as David Olney, Steve Young, Tom House, Bob Livingston and RB Morris.

"They're legends in my world," he says. "They're not household names, but they are to me."

'ONE OF THE BEST EXPERIENCES'

Take a drive on Hammett Bridge Road in Greer, and one might think the Hammetts are the Upstate town's version of the Trumps.

Hammett was the last name of Easterling's grandfather, and when he died 10 years ago, the family had to sell a third of the farm to pay the estate taxes.

Now, Easterling says, the state wants more of the green space.

"It just happens to be where there's a lot of growth," Easterling says. "Everybody has been trying to get us out of there for years.

"We want to keep the land because it's our heritage."

You can hear and feel Easterling's pain as she stands on the deck at the Lovejoys' home. A string of dragonfly-shaped lights crawls down the pergola's poles.

Easterling commands words like Emmylou Harris, and the patterned vocal cracks shed emotion.

"I love that little tear in your voice," audience member Liz Simmons says.

"It works well with country music," Easterling responds. "I learned that from Judy Garland."

Easterling, who sings Americana, country and folk, wants to play more house shows.

"Some people do that exclusively," she says. "You do make out better than a club gig."

"Any artist that I know that does folk or acoustic music wants to do more house concerts. It's just one of the best experiences there is."

Snyder, who lives in Lawrence, Kan., and launched Concerts In Your Home two years ago, plays 15 to 40 house shows yearly, trying to book them in three-day blocks on the weekend.

"That's usually enough for me to fly anywhere in the U.S.," he says. "That's something I can't do playing bars."

If 25 people come to a club show, it's a failure. But if 25 come to a house concert, it's a huge success. Most shows charge \$15 per person.

That's \$375 the artist could potentially pocket.

Bentz Kirby, who recently began hosting shows at his Forest Acres home, dubbed The Alien Carnival house, says the performers should get all the door money.

"You shouldn't be doing these things for profit," he says.

(The shows apparently don't raise any legal concerns, at least in Richland County, where authorities don't view them any differently from, say, hosting a party.

"It only an issue if it becomes a nuisance and violated a noise ordinance," says Stephanycq Snowden, the county spokeswoman.)

Kirby and the Lovejoys have replaced Uncle Gram, who has had two knee surgeries and passed the baton like Riddle did to him.

"I guess I have a certain affinity for some of the folks he was hosting, and I wanted to keep them coming to town," Kirby says.

Riddle says there are more house concerts nowadays. And more variety, too. Several venues allow patrons to bring alcohol, while Riddle didn't allow drinking.

"And that probably hurt my attendance, but I didn't want to chance the liability," he says.

But rarely is there barroom rowdiness.

"They come to hear the artist," Uncle Gram says. "They didn't come to talk about last night's 'Desperate Housewives.'"

'REAL HOMEY'

As the late evening drifts into night, Ben Lovejoy anchors a spotlight to a porch post, sliding a piece of infrared film over the bulb to dull the beam.

It turns Easterling's blond hair, which is now in a bun, strawberry red.

Touches like that make The Opulent 'Possum a remarkable venue.

The Lovejoys were introduced to house shows by their 20-year-old son, Cameron, who saw Danny Schmidt play at his friend's house.

He gave a CD to his mom, a home-schooling parent who also is a certified dog show judge, who became enamored.

Schmidt played The Opulent 'Possum's inaugural show in November 2006. "It was a late birthday gift" for Kelly, says Ben, an Air Force colonel.

But it was huddle-together-in-blankets frigid that night.

"Every quilt we owned" was used, Cameron says.

That show, which also featured bellydancers and a fire pit, opened the house-concert door for the Lovejoys, who have a neat historical connection to music.

In 1974 Ben's uncle, Sam Lovejoy, sabotaged the building of a power plant in Montague, Mass., by knocking down a 500-foot tower, an early act of civil disobedience against atomic power.

Sam Lovejoy later helped organize the 1979 Musicians United for Safe Energy "No Nukes" concert at Madison Square Garden, which featured Crosby, Stills and Nash, Bruce Springsteen, Gil Scott-Heron and Jackson Browne.

So hosting concerts comes naturally to the Lovejoys, whose place feels cozy as Easterling performs, like a summertime party at a relative's house.

If nothing else, they have the vibe down.

The Lovejoys' guests eat from a buffet of labeled covered dishes and desserts on the dining room table. For each show, Kelly Lovejoy, who's not a fan of potluck, makes a meat, vegetable and dessert so, as Cameron points out, "there's not only potato salad."

Many of the ingredients she uses are grown in a lovely garden, scenically green and alive.

There are cucumbers, beans, eggplant, squash, okra, cantaloupe, potatoes, tomatoes, grapes and figs.

There's also a bog garden with carnivorous plants, including a Venus Fly trap, and two beehives that produce delicious honey.

An olive tree, taken from Ben's grandmother's yard and replanted, seems to yawn and stretch when the wind blows.

The backyard has the easiness of a farm. No shouting for bartender attention or drunken laughter coming from barstools. No wonder Easterling was comfortable enough to share stories about her family.

She felt at home.

"It's a real homey, kind of neighborly thing," she says. "It's almost like you're already friends.

"It's nice to be in someone's home."

Angela Easterling finds her 'country' far away from home

By: Craig Ostroff - Managing Editor, Montgomery News (PA)

03/25/2008

Angela Easterling brings some modern country to Ardmore's Milkboy Coffee on Saturday, March 29.

Angela Easterling found her home in a most unlikely place.

Easterling, a native of the small town of Taylors, S.C., didn't find her calling to country/roots/Americana music until her senior year of college, which she spent, of all places, in California.

"I didn't start listening to country or bluegrass music until I got older and left home," Easterling said in a recent telephone interview. "I started listening a little more in college. Johnny Cash was the first I really fell in love with, and Hank Williams.

"Growing up here in the South, you're so inundated with it, and it was not the kind of music that appealed to me. When I got away from here and discover the roots of it, like Johnny Cash and Hank Williams, the Carter family, I started listening

to Emmylou Harris. When I was out in California, I started playing country music, running around with a whole group of sort of renegade country people out there."

When she arrived at Emerson College in Boston, Easterling's goal was musical theater. But as she started writing music, her path took a decidedly different turn.

"I discovered a lot of that music up there [in Boston] that I had not really listened to growing up. I started out writing more folk music, and people would say, 'Wow, you sound like you sing country.' It was just there, in my blood. When I started writing songs, that was just the way I wrote, so then I started listening to artists people told me I sounded like, Emmylou Harris and Linda Ronstadt. The more I discovered it, the more I was inspired by it. I didn't go out looking to be a country-type singer, but it sort of found me."

The result of her time in California is captured on Easterling's debut CD, "Earning Her Wings," on which Easterling wrote 10 of the 11 tracks (the final one is an old gospel song originally penned by a distant relative).

Recorded "on a shoestring budget and a lot of love," Easterling is joined by many of her friends from Los Angeles, musicians who have worked with the likes of Dwight Yoakam and Lucinda Williams, on an album that has helped Easterling earn her wings. Indeed, the album was named the Americana Album of the Year by Smart Choice Music, a UK-based online music store specializing in Americana and country music.

Easterling opens the CD with a gospel-inspired "River Jordan," and proves more than able to touch the heartstrings on songs such as the emotional tribute to a personal hero in "Dear Johnny," to the tender ballad "Accordion," which tells the story both of small-town pride as well as a father-daughter relationship across the miles. She can also up the tempo with guitar- and fiddle-driven tunes such as "Eyes of a Fool" and "Feel Like Drinking," songs that are sure to get your toes tappin', whether they're in cowboy boots, business shoes or flip-flops.

And while many of her songs touch on topics that are not new to the genre, Easterling provides a fresh approach and sound.

"In California, I had the freedom to explore different styles and blend different things together, and to just try different things," Easterling said. "If I'd been at home and listening to this style of music, I don't think it would have had the same impact on me as it had being far from home."

"If a song's not interesting to me, I'm not going to ask somebody else to listen to it. Even if I'm talking about just an ordinary thing, I'm going to try to find a way to put my own spin on it. I try to keep it interesting so there's that little twist that'll be different."

Take the song "Truck-Drivin' Man," for instance. Rather than an ode to her "knight in shining Diesel," the upbeat tune, which is always a hit when performed live, is Easterling's fish-out-of-water story of a country gal living in California.

It's even gotten her in trouble once or twice.

"I was playing that song in Virginia about a year ago," Easterling recalled with a laugh and a bit of terror, "and this guy came up to me with about one tooth. 'I have a truck!'"

Though she jokes she might have to revise some of the lyrics, Easterling said the song is primarily a dig on California guys.

"I was on a date with a guy in L.A., and he kept looking over my shoulder the whole time," Easterling said. "He would ask me a question about myself and he wasn't paying attention to anything I said, he was just looking over my shoulder, and I was thinking, 'There must be someone really famous behind us or something.' So at one point I turn around to see who's behind me, and as it turned out, I was sitting in front of a huge mirror."

"So this was my extreme reaction to L.A. guys. I'd prefer a guy who can change the oil in my car than the type of guy who can give me hair tips. It's a fun song to sing, audiences really like that song. It's probably not my greatest contribution to art, but it's fun, it makes people smile and makes them laugh."

Touring extensively over the next several months, Easterling will join the talented and always charming Carsie Blanton as well as Jeff Dernlan - who just released a follow-up to his highly regarded 2006 CD "Broadmoor" - at MilkBoy Coffee in Ardmore March 29.

"People [in the Northeast] still like that kind of music. It's not something they'd usually see all the time and it's different," Easterling said. "I've even had people tell me they liked my live show more than the CD. Some people are not as open to listening to country, but they like the live show."

"When I perform, what I want to do is to take [the audience] on a journey with me. I really want to communicate, the things I'm talking about. It's about the story, about the journey. It'll be really mellow, down-to-earth, and we'll be like old friends, tell our stories and laugh and cry and have fun."

Article in King Of Prussia Courier (PA)

Angela Easterling brings country-roots to MilkBoy

Preview By Joe McAllister

What goes around comes around. That which was square is now cool or cutting edge. It's the inevitable cycle of things. Take "Made in America," for instance-as in music.Singer-songwriter Angela Easterling brings her brand of Americana country-roots songs to the MilkBoy in Ardmore this Saturday, March 29, at 8 p.m. with local performers Jeff Dernlan and Carsie Blanton. Haven't heard of this sweet-voiced singer/songwriter? The Internet is abuzz with accolades.

SmartChoiceMusic.com named her debut album Earning Her Wings as the top Americana Album of the Year. What is Americana, and who is Angela Easterling?

Americana is the hot musical genre right now. It has its own chart in Rolling Stone Magazine. The New York Times calls it "the coolest music scene today." Americana is Dwight Yoakam, Neil Young, Johnny Cash, June Carter, Hank Williams, Joe Ely, Buddy Miller, Sunny Sweeney, Emmylou Harris, John Fogarty, Levon Helm, Steve Earle, Alison Krause and Robert Plant all wrapped up in one. It's folk/rock with a twang.

Easterling doesn't buy into the hype. She didn't choose Americana; Americana chose her. "In writing my own songs, I felt the country stuff coming out of me. People would say, 'You're a country singer,'" recalls Easterling, of Greenville, S.C. "I love the roots of Americana music and how it relates to us. It talks of regular experiences in ordinary lives."

Although Easterling grew up in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains and returned home there a year ago, she's no country bumpkin. She studied musical theater at Emerson College in Boston. When she wrote in college, instead of Rodgers and Hammerstein, Cash and Carter flowed from her pen. She cut her teeth performing at the legendary Club Passim on Harvard Square, then migrated west to Emerson's L.A. campus.

Five years in Los Angeles brought her shoulder-to-shoulder with such alt country heroes as Lucinda Williams, Deana Carter, Dave Alvin and Michelle Shocked. It seemed everybody out there played Americana, even John Doe of the notorious punk band X.

Her career highlights include opening for Suzy Boggus and Ray Price and playing at different festivals. Americana is all about playing festivals. "It's exciting and nerve-racking at the same time," says Easterling, who mixes neo-traditionalist country music with honky-tonk. "Playing at festivals is definitely a highlight: the people, the artists-all the different music."

Festivals aside, the intimate setting of MilkBoy suits Easterling just fine. One of her most effusive fans is MilkBoy co-owner and local producer Tommy Joyner. "The audience can expect an evening of soulful country-influenced songs written from the heart," says Joyner. "She's a quality, standout artist. Her music just jumps out of the speakers."

As for Easterling, she's looking forward to a night of storytelling, in lyrics and in song introductions. "I like to talk about where the songs came from and about the writing process," she says. "People seem to like that."

Easterling will perform acoustically without her band and feature such fan favorites as the upbeat "Feel Like Drinkin," the Hank Williams-inspired "Toy," and "Truck Drivin' Man"-a female's perspective on East versus West Coast men.

As for her Broadway aspirations? "Right now, I'm pursuing my own style of writing. Maybe someday when I'm old..."

Meanwhile, she'll continue to put her new twist on old country. "The older stuff still rings true to me. It has a lot of integrity."

To find out more about Angela Easterling and sample her music, visit www.angelaesterling.com.

Here's a recent interview I did for the Greenville Scene (www.greenvillescene.com)

ANGELA EASTERLING

Label: De L’Est

GS: Where are you from?

Angela Easterling: I was born in MS, but I grew up in Greer and Taylors. Most of my family is from SC. We have a farm in Greer that has been in our family since 1791 (my Mom’s side of the family - the Hammetts). I graduated from Eastside High and went to the Fine Arts Center for 3 years.

GS: When/Where/Why did you move away?

AE: I left to go to Emerson College in Boston. It was there that I started writing music. I finished my last year of school at Emerson’s external campus in Los Angeles and decided to stay there to pursue music and acting. Over the next few years, music became my priority.

GS: Did moving help your music career?

AE: Yes. Being in a large city like L.A. where the competition is stiff forces you to hone your talent and polish your material to stand out. I feel like I learned a lot about the business and about what I specifically have to offer. However, in this day and age, with computers, websites, myspace, etc, I don’t feel that it is necessary to move to a large music city, like LA, NYC or Nashville to have the kind of exposure those places offer. In fact, I just relocated back to Greenville only a few months ago, although I haven’t been there much as I’ve been touring a lot. It is much easier and cheaper for me to tour from Greenville than from L.A. Moving to L.A. did help me to a certain extent, so I’m really glad I did it. But moving back to Greenville has been a great decision as well. Ironically, I’ve found my exposure, fan base and career opportunities have only grown since leaving L.A.

GS: What are you doing these days?

AE: I am in the middle of a 6 week northeast tour and should be back down south in mid-July. I'm promoting my August 2006 release "Earning Her Wings". Later this summer, I will open up for Ray Price at the Birchmere in Alexandria, VA and for the Oak Ridge Boys in GA. It is an exciting year! You can also check out my website and Myspace for more info on what I'm doing.

Country singer credits unlikely inspiration

By Jim McGuinness

Gotricities.com 4/7/07

Her country-based sound draws from such influences as Johnny Cash, Emmylou Harris and the Carter Family.

But Angela Easterling's main musical inspiration isn't a country artist.

It's Judy Garland.

"She's why I wanted to be a singer in the first place," said Easterling, who will perform at Acoustic Coffeehouse on Saturday. "I don't remember a time in my life when I didn't love Judy Garland. A lot of things that I do with my voice that people think come from country music comes from listening to her."

The daughter of a Baptist minister, Easterling was captivated by movie musicals while growing up on her family's farm in Taylors, S.C. Upon graduation from high school, she enrolled as a musical theater major at Emerson College in Boston, later winding up at the school's satellite campus in Los Angeles.

Somewhere between Boston and L.A., her country music influences started to come together.

"The first country music I started listening to when I was in college was Johnny Cash," Easterling said. "But I didn't think of myself as someone who wanted to write and sing country music until I started listening

to Emmylou Harris. I was really influenced by some of her albums from the '70s, where she would get into so many various styles of songwriting with the songwriters she was covering;

Harris's influence can be heard on Easterling's self-released "Earning Her Wings" album. Backed by a fleet of Los Angeles musicians, she sings with conviction on the disc's 11 songs, 10 of which she wrote.

From Appalachian-styled ballads like the Carter Family-inspired "River Jordan" and the achingly beautiful title track to more uptempo songs such as the steel guitar-driven "Feel Like Drinking" and the rockabilly-flavored "Toy," Easterling glides through a wide range of material.

The lone non-original is the gospel sing-along "When I Wake Up To Sleep No More," a 1944 song written by distant relative Marion Easterling. Having known the song from her early days singing in church, Easterling was unaware that it was written by a relative. She learned of the family connection after noticing that Marion Easterling had written "When He Reached Down," a song from Johnny Cash's "My Mother's Hymn Book" album. After doing some research, she learned that she was related to the song's writer. She then rediscovered "When I Wake Up To Sleep No More" on Ralph Stanley's "Clinch Mountain Country" album.

"I decided to put it on my CD in lieu of another song that I had written," Easterling explained. "I thought that it was really neat that I was related to this guy."

Another song with a family history is "The Accordion," which tells the true story of Easterling's father trading a truck for a turn-of-the-century squeezebox.

"Some people in our church were having a hard time," Easterling explains. "Their car broke down, so my father gave them an old truck and [a man in the family] gave him his mother's accordion. I thought there was such humility in that — the fact that he wanted to give my dad this family heirloom."

After living in Los Angeles for several years, Easterling returned to South Carolina last fall. Upon her return, she wanted to investigate the Carter Family influence on her music. Prior to an Acoustic Coffeehouse gig in November, she and a friend stopped off in Hiltons, Va., where they were given a tour of A.P. Carter's cabin by Carter's granddaughter, Rita Forrester.

"She was really nice," Easterling said. "She invited us in and made a fire in the cabin. Then she showed us around and talked about the family a whole lot. It was just an amazing experience."

The trip inspired "A.P. Carter's Blues," a yet-to-be-recorded Easterling original song.

"If there's one person in the Carter Family I can identify with, it would be A.P.," Easterling said, "how hard he worked and the rambling spirit that he had."

Saturday's show starts at 9 p.m. Easterling will perform first, followed by Charlotte, N.C., trio the New Familiars at

10:15.

The Salisbury Post, Salisbury, NC, 3-8-07

GREER CITIZEN, 12-27-06

TAYLORS NATIVE NAMED "AMERICANA PICK OF THE YEAR" BY SMART CHOICE MUSIC by Leland Burch

Taylor's native Angela Easterling appears poised for stardom in the world of country music after her new album was recently chosen as the "Americana Pick of the Year" by Smart Choice Music.

The selection ranks Easterling's album "Earning Her Wings" atop the Ten Best list that includes such standouts as Vince Gill, Slaid Cleaves, Guy Clark and Bruce Robison.

"I am so honored and inspired by their confidence in me and my music", says the Eastside High graduate. "I could not have asked for a better present this holiday season."

Easterling has been touring the east coast this month, having presented three concerts in North Carolina and others in Maryland and Vermont. She will return to the region on March 2 for a concert in Flat Rock, NC.

The daughter of Mayson Easterling, a Baptist minister employed at North Greenville University, she studied Theatre at the Fine Arts Center while attending Eastside High.

After graduation, she enrolled at Emerson College in Boston, MA, to major in musical theatre. "My dream was to have a stage career, singing in Broadway musicals", Easterling said. "But I visited New York City several times while I was in college, and it just wasn't right for me."

Easterling spent her senior year in college in California where Emerson has a campus, and she has been there ever since. "I made a lot of friends and a lot of contacts. That got me some work making commercials and bit movie parts, and enabled me to focus on a music career."

She also discovered country music in California. "It was in a round-about way, because I didn't start writing songs until I was in college, and didn't listen to country music until after graduation!" That was a long way to go to find her calling.

"As a kid, the only music I ever heard was the music in church, old-time gospel. It had such an impact on me. That heritage has paid off for Easterling's newest collection of songs which she delivers in a range from the dynamic spitfire to the haunting performer.

Smart Choice Music said of Easterling, "As we are firmly nailing our colors to the mast at Smart Choice Music by championing new music, and the new generation of artists, it seems fitting that Angela Easterling's *Earning Her Wings* is our pick of the year."

"Having spent her formative years working in the West Coast country scene, Angela rediscovered her Carolina roots for this old-school country album. Delightful tongue-in-cheek pastiches of songs about truckers and cowboys, a hint of gospel and authentic acoustic instruments and production has the spirit of the Carter Family and Kitty Wells flowing throughout. However, Angela manages to put a youthful, new slant onto a well trodden path and has produced a vibrant debut album."

Of her budding career Easterling says, "I want to bring people together. I want to be a part of the musical traditions of the artists that came before me, but filter them through my voice and my experiences as a young woman in 2006. I want to uplift people. Music has the ability to do that and that is my ultimate goal." Smart Choice Music (www.smartchoicemusic.com) says:

"Angela Easterling, a native of Taylors, South Carolina, has released her album *Earning Her Wings* - and if you are a fan of old-time country music then this is definitely for you. Think Emmylou Harris, Loretta Lynn or the Carter Family and you may be getting close, but you can judge for yourself - We are so convinced about this release that we will give you your money back if you do not enjoy the CD ! (We'll credit you for the cost plus postage against future orders in the store) Can't say fairer than that, can we?"

Wire Service Report, March 8, 2005

L.A.'s Indie 103.1's Roots Rock Show "Watusi Rodeo" Celebrates One Year Anniversary With Live Extravaganza On March 11

John Doe, Steve Wynn, Randy Weeks, Remedy Motel and Special Guests Michelle Shocked, Peter Case and Tim

Easton Headline "Watusi Rodeo" One-Year Anniversary Show, This Friday, March 11 at King King in Hollywood

Los Angeles roots rock stars John Doe, Steve Wynn en the Miracle 3, Remedy Motel, Randy Weeks, the Sin City All Stars and special guests Michelle Shocked, Peter Case, Tim Easton, Austin Hanks, Tonya Watts, Waylon Payne and Angela Easterling will commemorate the one-year anniversary of "Watusi Rodeo," the acclaimed roots-rock program on the city's world-famous free-form alternative radio station, Indie 103.1 FM.

The event will take place this Friday, March 11 at 8 p.m. at King King, 6555 Hollywood Blvd. in Hollywood. Admission is \$10. Doors open at 7 p.m. A Christmas event held in December 2004 sold out and turned the club over three times, so fans are advised to get there early.

"Watusi Rodeo" first went on the air at Indie 103.1 FM in March 2004. While it has become a home to L.A.'s burgeoning Americana scene, host Doc Holiday describes it as a "roots rock" program.

At first the program was an hour and featured no live guests. But within 90 days of its inception, it had expanded to two hours, and has since gone on to feature live interviews and performances by such artists as Steve Earle, Tift Merritt, Dave Alvin, John Doe, Peter Case, Anne McCue and other artists both national and regional.

Indie 103.1 FM's terrestrial signal reaches a goodly portion of Los Angeles and Orange Counties with dual transmitters in Santa Monica and Newport Beach. In addition, the station (and "Watusi Rodeo") have attracted listeners on the Internet (go to <http://www.indie103.fm> and click "listen live") in such countries as U.K., France, Australia, Canada, Sweden and Iceland – not to mention the rest of the U.S.

The format of the station and L.A.'s vibrant roots, Americana and singer/songwriter scene have given Doc and "Watusi Rodeo" a wealth of music from which to draw.

The Watusi Rodeo First Anniversary show on March 11 at King King in Hollywood is co-presented by Sin City Marketing and No Depression magazine. THE PASADENA STAR NEWS/TRIBUNE, MARCH 2, 2005

Making It Through the Night

Western Beat pays tribute to Kris Kristofferson

By: Paul Andersen

He graduated Phi Beta Kappa as a creative writing major at Pomona College, was a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University in England and turned down a professorship at West Point to try his hand as a songwriter in Nashville. Along the way, he helped to change the face of country and western music forever as the original outlaw, by spurring a merger of rock and roll attitude and a singer/songwriter's artistry with a respect for classic country elements, a bubbling stream of music that is mirrored in a genre now known as Americana music.

He's also acted opposite Barbra Streisand, won a trio of Grammy Awards and knows his way around a helicopter. And with his recent induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame, Kris Kristofferson can certainly add "legend" to his laundry list of achievements.

But unlike Elvis Presley or Gram Parsons, concerts focusing on his song catalog in L.A. have been virtually non-existent, so tomorrow night's "Western Beat Tribute to Kris Kristofferson" hoedown at Highland Grounds in Hollywood finally rectifies that situation.

"There are a number of artists who get annual tributes (around town), and they totally deserve them, but there are a number of other deserving artists, too," says local music journalist Bliss, who put together the line-up and will host the show. "Besides, it was a terrific excuse to go back through my Kris Kristofferson albums. And it has been really gratifying; I've been amazed at the responses from the artists, many of whom asked to take part in this after they heard about it."

The format will have each performer do a pair of Kristofferson tunes along with another song of their own. Scheduled to perform are Tim Easton, Angela Easterling, Mike Stinson, Kristin Mooney and Eric Heywood, Chris Richards, Fur Dixon and Steve Werner, Kip Boardman, David Zink, Kalai King, Anny Celsi and Duane Jarvis, Dawn McCoy and Josh Schwartz and Elisa Randazzo, with chances likely that there will be some special surprise sit-ins. After all, Kristofferson is highly respected within the musical community.

Kristofferson's best known songs are probably "Help Me Make It Through the Night" and "Me and Bobby McGee," whose version by Janis Joplin is a staple on classic rock radio. South Carolina native Angela Easterling will tackle the former in her opening spot in the line-up, while closer Dawn McCoy will most likely lead a sing-along with the latter.

"There were so many great songs to choose from, but I'm getting to do my two favorites (she will also do "Why Me, Lord?,") says Easterling, who is calling from [Mad] Dog Studio, where she has spent the day recording a tribute of her own, a song in memory of Johnny Cash that has gotten great response in her recent live

sets. "I picked them two months ago, and now with us having lost Sammi Smith a couple of weeks ago (she had a chart-topping hit with "Help Me Make It..."), it is especially poignant to do it."

Easterling admits that she is still finding her place in the songwriter community of her new home base. "I'm still getting connected, becoming part of the scene, and shows like this help; besides, they're a lot of fun to do. And I really think I've been a Californian all my life, only I never knew it. I was always a bit of a weirdo back there in South Carolina, but I really feel at home here. Yet I'm glad to be from the South and I still feel a connection with my roots."

Not unlike that old outlaw himself, Kris Kristofferson. The Mint, Los Angeles

Material: Angela Easterling is a singer/songwriter who stirs together an unusual mix of gospel, country and folk. Alternating on guitar and keyboard, this performer fits somewhere between the Indigo Girls and Tori Amos. Lyrically simplistic, with an underlying angst and sadness, her songs reveal basic insights into relationships and spirituality.

The song, "Beloved", is perhaps the strongest in the set, bringing forth the passion behind her lyrics. She is also proficient at country, which she displays in her cover of Merle Haggard's "Bottle Let Me Down" and her own ballad, "Cowboy".

Musicianship: Easterling plays most skillfully at the keys, with grace and fluidity. On guitar, she executes her upbeat melodies with simplicity and ease. Vocally, most of her songs have an ethereal, haunting quality, but her real vocal power lies in the songs that are in the lower range, showing off a raw strength. There is a grittiness and a kind of "hard-knocks" element in her vocals, almost reminiscent of Stevie Nicks, when she sings her most serious songs, especially "Night Stain".

Performance: Easterling's energy brightens the room from the very start of the show. With her shiny cowboy boots and smile, she invites you in. As she eases into the set, she begins to joke. Her humor and frankness draws you in further,

creating a light-hearted atmosphere. When you leave, you feel like a close friend who came to hear a few tunes.

Summary: Overall, Angela Easterling is a performer who could warm up any room. Her lyrics and melodies would especially appeal to young female audiences. However, her inner strength has not yet been fully accessed. If she continues to concentrate on her vocal prowess, Easterling could become and act to be reckoned with.

- Heather Gandsey, Music Connection