

# Bonnie Bishop



By the time Bonnie Bishop released her oh-so-appropriately titled 2016 album, *Ain't Who I Was*, she had already experienced several Cinderella-story career moments. First, her idol Bonnie Raitt recorded one of her songs, “Not Cause I Wanted To,” for her 2012 comeback album, *Slipstream*. Then New York Times critic Jon Pareles named it his Song of the Year, and Raitt’s album won a Grammy. Bishop also got to hear songs she’d penned sung by stars of the hit TV show “Nashville,” while Raitt covered another of her songs, “Undone” on 2016’s *Dig In Deep*. Since then, Bishop has learned to accept such experiences — not to mention touring Europe and Scandinavia, earning coveted performing spots on two Cayamo cruises and playing Willie Nelson’s annual Luck Reunion — as her reality, one that’s better than any fairytale.

But as her growing legions of fans may know, the fantastical story twist is that most of these events occurred after Bishop had decided to give up her music career and enroll in graduate school. That was when a mentor hooked her up with Dave Cobb, who was then becoming Nashville’s hottest producer (Jason Isbell, Chris Stapleton, Brandi Carlile). Next thing she knew, she had turned the heartache of a divorce and a hail-Mary leap of faith into a soul-filled album; one that knocked critics out at Rolling Stone, Billboard, the New York Times, the Washington Post and just about everywhere else. The Houston Press declared her the “new queen of country soul” and No Depression practically shouted, “If we can go ahead and choose the BEST album of the year, it’s clearly Bonnie Bishop’s.”

That gospel-infused album not only hit the upper reaches of the Americana music chart and reignited her career, it took it to levels she’d never expected, including those farflung adventures and recording with Paul Thorn.

But Bishop has been eager to do even more. This fall, she’ll release *The Walk*, produced by drummer Steve Jordan (John Mayer, Keith Richards, Robert Cray), a groove-based album that’s light years from *Ain't Who I Was*. In the meantime, she’s also recorded new acoustic versions of several songs from previous albums and compiled her favorites into a collection titled *House Sessions: Vol. 1* — so named because it actually was recorded in her house, on the grand piano her father left behind when her parents divorced.

While she was waiting to record with Jordan, Bishop and her piano relocated from Nashville to Fort Worth, Texas, into a place she describes as “this cool old house with hardwood floors and big, open windows.” She knew she wanted to record in that house, on that piano. But she didn’t want to use the tunes she was saving for Jordan; instead, she chose to plumb her past. Because she was unhappy with the sound of albums she’d released earlier in her career, Bishop had long ago pulled her 2002-2010 catalog from online services. Consequently, many of her newer fans have never heard those releases. But those who have been listening since her *Soft To The Touch* days often request her older songs at shows, making it clear they were worth presenting again.

But another emotional connection besides the piano was involved as well.

“There’s something about leaving Nashville and coming home to Texas that made me want to embrace that part of my past,” Bishop reveals. “Maybe that’s part of maturing as an artist; I can celebrate the whole journey now.” Accompanying herself on acoustic guitar and keys, she wound up with nine tracks, three of which had never been recorded. The songs are augmented by just a few other instruments, including upright bass and electric guitar by Fort Worth talents Aden Bubeck and Ryan Tharp, respectively.

“In these stripped-down versions,” Bishop says, “you can really hear the sound of this old house and my progression as a writer. I called it *House Sessions: Vol. I* because I loved making it so much, I’m already planning to let fans suggest other old songs they want me to go back and record.”

Among the tracks she included is the title song from her 2012 album, *Free*. “That album felt like my first real piece of artistry,” Bishop confesses. “Until then, I felt like I was trying to evoke a sound instead of creating my own.”

With *Free*, Bishop had finally found her voice — and laid the foundation on which she and Cobb would build *Ain’t Who I Was*.

And now Bishop is building again. Though she’s not ready to reveal too many details about *The Walk*, she mentions, “The songs are not as finite as my older recordings. It’s much more about the music; the jam. The first song is 7 minutes and 36 seconds long. I also made no effort whatsoever to make a radio single.”



She tossed other industry norms aside, too, intentionally crafting an album meant to be experienced on vinyl, one side at a time. “I think these are the best songs I’ve ever written,” she says. “They’re very deep, very much about the struggle as a human being to continue to evolve and keep moving forward, in our personal journeys and in the collective sense. As long as the sun comes up, we have to keep going forward.”

Bishop asked Jordan to produce because she knew he’d create rhythms to keep the music moving, and make it fun to perform and hear — without requiring the storytelling setups singer-songwriters typically deliver.

“I’ll always be Bonnie Bishop the songwriter,” she says. “But I also just want to get up and sing and dance sometimes and not have to read my journal out loud.”

Just a few years ago, Bishop thought she was ready to abandon music. Now she wants to make as much of it as possible, to share her gift however she can. One manifestation is her work with SongwritingWith:Soldiers, which helps soldiers, war veterans and their families express their experiences through the healing power of song. Bishop recently had the honor of performing

several of these songs at the 2019 Congressional Medal of Honor gala in New York.

“I’m just gonna flood the world with music this year,” she declares. “And I don’t care whether anybody thinks that’s a bad idea. Who knows what next year will bring? I want to give all the music I’ve got as long as I’m here.”

No, Bonnie Bishop ain’t who she was. She’s stronger, deeper, more soulful and more sure of herself — and so ready to take this thrill ride of a life from *The Walk* to wherever it may lead. It’s already been one helluva trip. And it’s getting better all the time.

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Listen to *House Sessions: Vol. 1*

[open.spotify.com/album/2ZHKDRep0H5m5ON0G63HIB](https://open.spotify.com/album/2ZHKDRep0H5m5ON0G63HIB)

Watch Bonnie’s official video for “Black Mercedes Benz”

[youtube.com/watch?v=sdtBpM17sa8&feature=youtu.be](https://youtube.com/watch?v=sdtBpM17sa8&feature=youtu.be)

Listen to *Ain’t Who I Was*

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## PRESS

*“Her vocals mix the Southern sass of Shelby Lynne with the guts of Susan Tedeschi, leaving room for a fair amount of Bonnie Raitt-styled grit and gumption.”*

– [American Songwriter](#)

*“I love her work! She has a beautiful soul, artistry, honesty and courage. Bonnie Bishop is as gifted a prose writer as she is a musician, not to mention she’s an incredible singer!”*

– [Bonnie Raitt](#)

*“A gifted songwriter and a powerhouse singer, her voice booms with the force of a Texas straight-line squall...brilliant.”*

– [Nashville Scene](#)

*“This is Bonnie Bishop’s triumphant homecoming, her declaration as an artist renewed ... What did I just watch? I wonder. Then it hits me: greatness.”*

– [Wide Open Country](#)