

## Terri Clark

*“The last two years have made me focus on what’s important in my life, the things that really matter. When you lose somebody you’re incredibly close to and almost lose someone who’s so important to you...it changes your perspective in a way that’s not negotiable.”*

And so, Clark made a shift with *In My Next Life* from moments, to things that matter more lastingly. *In My Next Life*, her debut BNA Records album, finds Clark awash in change with new music on a new record label, single...again, and dealing with her mother’s life-threatening disease.

But don’t worry. Don’t think she’s suddenly gone serious, because having fun, feeling the joy in the moment, especially the moments that try one’s core, is still a major part of Clark’s charm.

Only Terri Clark, a woman in full, a Country Music Association and Academy of Country Music Top Female Vocalist nominee and Grand Ole Opry member, could release a song called “Dirty Girl” - and make it about four-wheeling and tearing down engines. But then Terri Clark, who brings her own brand of smolder to turbo-traditional country music, has always been more about a broken-in pair of Justin Boots than the latest Jimmy Choo stilettos.

“This music,” she admits, laughing, “has way more horsepower, which is exciting... and the lyrics are more direct, more colorful. It really puts an awful lot of life right out there.

“I think ‘In My Next Life’ speaks more to my life and how I want to live it, or ‘Dirty Girl’ which goes a little deeper into who I am, how I live this life,” she says, defining the subtle shift. “I think ‘I Just Wanna Be Mad’ is something we’ve all done, been there, but it’s a moment, not necessarily a way of living, or a philosophy about the bigger reality of life.”

One has to love a woman whose “philosophy” comes backed with huge guitars, grooves you could cut into mountains and a voice that’s got enough depth, it’s like falling into a valley. Leaning more towards “greasier, grittier” this time around, producer Garth Fundis challenged her and supported the Canadian songwriter/guitar slinger in her quest to expand the signature Clark attack.

“I’ve never worked with a producer who’s done all that he has - and it was a little intimidating, but then his confidence in me with my music was so inspiring! He let me run with things, right down to tempos. Instead of making a record that is what a producer wants me to be, some aspect of who I am, this was Garth bringing out *all* of the things in me I’d been trying to get to. He brought it all out, brought it together and it’s pretty amazing.”

*In My Next Life* was made under perhaps the most difficult circumstances Clark had ever faced in the studio. Many of the sessions were scheduled between her mother’s aggressive treatments for cancer, with Clark commuting back and forth as the uncertainty of the outcome hung in the balance.

“When I was doing the vocal for ‘Never Say No,’ I’d found out my mother had been diagnosed with cancer and I didn’t know if I could get through it. You don’t know if the woman in the song makes it - and I think she dies, and we didn’t know about my mom. It’s funny: there I was living inside this lyric, but then it’s times like these music *really* hits you, opens you up and takes all the things you can’t say. You put them in the singing, and suddenly you can.

“People come up and tell me stories about how certain songs got them through something hard - a broken romance, a parent or a child being sick or not making it, a personal tragedy - I get it on a whole other, deeper level. It *is* powerful what music can do.”

That strength and joy and commitment are certainly hard-won. Though always hard-working, Clark’s hiatus to be there for her mother let her slow down enough to look at the whats and the whys of an incredible decade-long career. She saw what she loved, what she burned for - and also the things she did to fit in. Realizing her own uniqueness, and recognizing the artists - Reba, the Judds, Tammy Wynette—she loved were truly, wholly singular, she made a promise to herself to focus on what set her apart.

Beyond the intense live shows (“I go out to make people who’re already fans go, ‘It’s even better than the last time I saw her...,’ and people who’d come along and didn’t know, I want them walking away, going ‘Damn...,’” she explains), there is the willingness to invest herself on a more personal plane in the realm of pretty propulsive commercially viable music rather than the easier-to-be-pensive singer/songwriter realm.

“These songs speak to people like me, trying to make sense out of this crazy ride. You want to reach people where they live, pull them in, and make them feel not so alone, even as you’re making them feel good. You want to get in their car with them, on the radio or listening to the CD and give them something they can hold on to, feel passionate about. Passion, at this point, is everything.”

She ought to know. Standing on the other side of a divorce, revealing that marriage, even to someone she'd known and loved for years, turned out to be something that she wasn't quite ready for. It was pain. It was failure. It was one more thing to work through while she was coping with her mother's illness and sorting out how she wanted to launch a whole new phase of her powered-up modern country career with a label who was thrilled to have her and a producer who challenged her to be more.

And in that, the girl who paid her dues singing for tips on a stool at Tootsies Orchid Lounge - the lower Broadway beer joint where Kris Kristofferson ran a tab when he was a struggling songwriter and the Grand Ole Opry stars would run in for a few beers between Saturday night shows at the Ryman - got a few more lessons in not only what country songs are made of, but what people face every day.

"Look, I feel a sense of mortality in all this, so anything I can do to make people feel better," she offers. "You know: seize dream, be who you are, make it happen! I was an 18-year old kid who had not clue one, except I loved country music and I wanted to be part of it. I had my guitar tied to my wrist, because Lower Broad was pretty rough back then, but I was 'going for it.' And that's the deal: learn all you can about what you do, what you want, dig in and don't forget to have fun along the way."

"I think the difference is me, where I am and what I can give. They *know*, you know..." Terri Clark pauses, considering *In My Next Life*, which has in so many ways already begun. With a great new project, a first single that plays with words and what they mean in a way that leans straight into her one-of-the-guys-but-even-better appeal and so much music to make, even the hard times seem leavened. In some ways, it's every working musician, singer or songwriter's dream, but for Terri Clark, it's her reason for breathing.

"When it's all said and done, I'd rather have my tombstone read, 'Her Energy Added To...' because hopefully people took that and changed their lives. And if it doesn't *change* their life, maybe it was an escape for them because they went out, had fun, and remembered how to laugh and cry and be in the moment.

"Records and artists and songs did that for me, and look where I am. I just want do that for as many other people as I can."

*In My Next Life* is a pretty good place to start.