

BIO (258 words)

When Kelly Willis, Melissa Carper and Brennen Leigh – three accomplished singer-songwriters who have forged their own unique lanes in country music – joined forces as a power trio, there was no more appropriate moniker than **Wonder Women of Country**.

At the end of 2021, after serendipitously sharing bills separately several times, Willis approached Leigh and Carper about teaming up and playing some shows together. Wanting more than your standard songwriter-in-the-round arrangement, the three learned each other's songs to create a more integrated, band approach. Those first few shows together were so much fun and so well-received that they decided to continue.

Wonder Women of Country have discovered that, together, their own individual superpowers come alive. (One of their superpowers is being able to find hidden treasures in any thrift or vintage store.) With Leigh playing lead guitar and mandolin, Carper on upright bass, and Willis playing rhythm guitar, they support each other's distinctive original material with beautiful three-part harmonies.

"At every show, folks were asking if we had records together," says Willis. "After months and months of that, we finally found a chance to go make one."

Their forthcoming, six-song EP, *Wonder Women of Country: Willis, Carper, Leigh*, was recorded at Bismieux on the Hill in Austin, TX in December of 2023. It features two songs by each artist, including a couple of Carper/Leigh co-writes, and one reimagined John Prine tune. Each track captures the magic these three create night after night on the road. **Wonder Women of Country** are the super heroes we've all been waiting for.

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SXSW BIO (1200 characters)

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Kelly Willis

Kelly Willis was barely 20 when a “check-this-kid-out” tip from Texas songwriter Nanci Griffith landed her on the radar of producer Tony Brown, who promptly signed her to MCA Records. An auspicious fireball of a debut, 1990's *Well Travelled Love*, and a plumb spot on the soundtrack to *Thelma & Louise* followed.

Kelly moved to Rykodisc in 1999 and recorded *What I Deserve*, which changed everything. “A big part of making that record was me thinking, ‘I’ll probably never get to make another one after this, so if this has to be my swan song, I’m not going to compromise,’” she says today. “That was a really big sea change for me to take the reins like that, and it was incredibly satisfying and gratifying that it then found a home with Ryko and did so well. It was a pivotal moment that fueled the rest of my career.”

A bracingly assertive showcase not just for Willis' masterful control of her “enormous voice” (per noted critic Robert Christgau) but also for her burgeoning songwriting chops (be it solo or collaborating with the likes of John Leventhal and the Jayhawks' Gary Louris), *What I Deserve* clinched her standing as a bona fide darling of the national (and international) alt-country scene. Writers from *No Depression* to *Rolling Stone* cheered her “comeback,” and fans in her adopted hometown voted it “Album of the Year” in the Austin Music Awards. A decade later would find her inducted into the Austin Music Hall of Fame.

The albums Willis has made since *What I Deserve* have only burnished her reputation as Austin's reigning queen of Americana. Three of those albums, including 2019's

Beautiful Lie, were duo records made with her now ex-husband, fellow singer-songwriter Bruce Robison — who also produced Willis' last solo album, 2018's "richly satisfying" (NPR) *Back Being Blue*.

Willis is happy to be playing shows again post pandemic shutdown, connecting with fans old and new both as a full-time "solo" artist again for the first time in years, and as one-third of her favorite new joyride — Wonder Women of Country, a not-just-a-song-swap trio with her sister soulmates Brennen Leigh and Melissa Carper.

"We started that a year ago, thinking we were just going to do a small run of shows together, but the shows went over so well that we just kept going," she enthuses. "The whole thing has just been amazing and super fun. I'm loving it!"

Brennen Leigh

Brennen Leigh is an American songwriter, guitar player, mandolin player. Her songs have been recorded by Lee Ann Womack, Rodney Crowell, Sunny Sweeney, Charley Crockett, and many others. As renowned for her musicianship as for her writing, it's easy to see how Leigh caught the ear of greats like Guy Clark, who colorfully endorsed her flatpicking: "Brennen Leigh plays guitar like a motherfucker," and David Olney, who described her writing as "tender, violent, sentimental, foolish and wise, she is always Brennen. Confident and at ease with herself, without being a jerk about it."

Following her album "Prairie Love Letter, Leigh has continued to leave an imprint on Western music with "Obsessed With The West" featuring The Kings of Western Swing, Asleep At The Wheel and the highly-acclaimed "Ain't Through Honky Tonkin' Yet."

Up next for Leigh— uniting with renowned songwriting and performance counterparts Kelly Willis and Melissa Carper to form the powerhouse trio, Wonder Women of Country.

Melissa Carper

Melissa Carper grew up in rural Nebraska, absorbing the sounds of her parent's classic country record collection and playing bass and singing in her family's band. In her 20s, Carper began mining the depths of early jazz, blues, and old-time music, using those influences as the foundation for her own unique brand of Americana. Dubbed 'Hill-Billie Holiday' by friend and collaborator Chris Scruggs, she has been putting the foot on the gas of her solo career since 2020, with two critically acclaimed solo albums under her belt, and a new solo album slated for summer 2024. Carper has a long history of many successful band projects, and continues to play and record with Arkansas-based roots outfit, Sad Daddy. In the winter of 2021, she teamed up with Brennen Leigh and Kelly Willis for the power trio, Wonder Women of Country.