

Suzy Bogguss

B I O G R A P H Y

With *Swing*, Suzy Bogguss reveals once again she is a class act of true originality.

While ingenuity is the hallmark of a musical career that spans 16 years, nine studio albums, and countless miles on the road, the hypnotic potency of *Swing* truly brings Suzy's talent and versatility as an artist to the forefront. Here she is a sultry swing band vocalist, creating a mood of sensual innocence, shading her voice in textures too delicate to dissect.

In an industry filled with ambiguity, Suzy remains one of the rare artists who has managed to walk the line between critical acclaim and commercial success. Fans and critics alike have admired Suzy's vocal style, musicianship, and meaningful lyrics for nearly two decades. Yet *Swing* -- co-produced by Suzy with *Asleep At The Wheel* front man Ray Benson -- argues that Suzy is still evolving as an artist and has yet to reach her pinnacle.

Apart from the beautiful voice and command of the material on *Swing* -- her first studio album in three years -- Suzy sounds like she is singing in a sophisticated cabaret, sometimes playing the part of the vamp, with numerous lyrical double entendres and memorable lines throughout each performance.

"This music is where I am right now in my life. It's not a novelty. It's not me singing a collection of old standards. This is predominantly new material and a style I've always loved. The melodies are so natural for me because I grew up in a house full of that music."

Suzy was raised in the small town of Aledo, Illinois. She sang in her church choir and music was plentiful in the Bogguss home. As a young adult, Suzy started strumming a guitar and singing -- performing wherever she could find an audience. She picked up a considerable following in the Midwest and started touring the country, driving herself from gig to gig in a camper truck.

In those days, Suzy sang and played swing and jazz songs like "Someone To Watch Over Me," "House of Blue Lights" and "I Don't Want To Set The World On Fire" together with her folk and country songs.

"My audience has always enjoyed this style of music," Suzy says. "I've been doing 'Someone To Watch Over Me' and 'Eat At Joe's' in my set for years. They won't let me get away with not playing them. And I think they fit with my other stuff."

It was on one of these early road trips that Suzy first met Texas swing sensation Ray Benson and his band, *Asleep At The Wheel*.

"The first time I met Ray, he saved my life," Suzy chuckles. "I was actually opening for *Asleep At The Wheel* in 1984 at this huge dancehall in Montana. It's basically out on the highway in

the middle of a canyon near Yellowstone Park. The audience was the summer crew that worked at the park and at the ski resorts in the area. They wanted to dance and I'm up there singing with my guitar just trying to make my gas money. The crowd started getting pretty rowdy. I was trying to be cute about it but I was dying up there. Finally, Ray walks out on stage. The crowd went nuts, everyone started cheering. Ray holds up his arms, looks at them and says, 'Alright you guys. Let the girl play. She needs to get her pay for the night.' After he walked off the stage they were nice to me. Of course, then he came on after me with a nine-piece band and blew the roof off the place."

The encounter with Benson bloomed into a friendship over the years.

A madcap dream about a bus ride through San Francisco with Benson sparked Suzy's imagination. After the dream, Suzy realized she wanted to record an album with her old friend.

"The dream was crazy," Suzy recalls. "I was standing backstage waiting to perform. Ray was with me. I discovered a run in my stocking and I didn't want to perform until I got new stockings. Ray says 'Come with me' and takes me to this tour bus. There's nothing in it. No tables, no seats -- it's completely empty. Ray is driving and I'm standing next to him watching the scene outside. We're driving through the streets of San Francisco trying to find a department store to buy pantyhose. Of course, Ray is burning up the brakes on the crooked streets of San Francisco."

The next morning, Suzy recounted the dream to her husband and long time collaborator Doug Crider.

"I already knew I wanted to do a record with Ray when I was telling Doug about the dream," Suzy says. "But Doug jumped on it immediately. He said the empty bus was a sign of the wide-open, brand new possibilities. Ray driving through San Francisco was a sign that I had to trust him to take me where I need to go. I called Ray the very same day."

Swing was recorded at Benson's Bismieux Studio in Austin, Texas. In addition to Benson's instinctive guitar playing, the album features present members of Asleep At The Wheel (Jason Roberts, fiddle; David Sanger, drums) and past members (Floyd Domino, piano; Spencer Starnes, bass; and John Mills, sax and clarinet.)

"It was such a treat to me to play with those musicians," Suzy says. "All of them had the perfect touch for this type of music. The thing that blew me away the most was Ray's guitar playing, how soft his touch was and how the sound of his guitar was so clean and beautiful."

"If there is a singer's singer I would have to nominate Suzy for that title, but that really is too limited," Benson says. "She is also one of the few singers who connects with audiences in the country, folk, pop, and jazz worlds easily and successfully."

Suzy says recording in Austin was an important element to the authentic feel of *Swing*.

"It was apparent to me from my first conversation with Ray that I needed to go to Austin to do

this record. The whole Austin experience was fabulous for me. There are so many amazing talented people there that have such a business-free attitude about their art and music. That's the whole sentiment behind this album. The honest performances from the band—we could have easily produced the heck out of this thing but my goal was to capture that spontaneous, live vibe.”

Suzy initially envisioned a duet album with *Asleep At The Wheel*. Then her friend David Hungate introduced Suzy to Nashville songwriter April Barrows.

“April’s songs are amazing. They were exactly what I wanted. April has such a clever way of twisting the love theme. It’s a cross between being cute and provocative. Her songs allow me to play up the campy sex goddess thing.”

Suzy recorded two tunes co-written by Barrows and Hungate, the slow burning, “My Dream Is You” and lighthearted “Jumping Into Spring.” Three of Barrows’ solo compositions made the cut. “Burning The Toast” is a playful ode to romantic married life. Suzy, again showing her vocal prowess, very nearly scat sings on “Stay Out Of My Dreams.” Benson—his jocular growl a cute foil for Suzy’s charm -- duets on the jumpy “Cupid Shot Us Both With One Arrow.”

Suzy’s longtime band mate, Paul Kramer, also contributes a couple of gems to *Swing*.

“It blew my mind when I heard Paul’s songs,” Suzy says. “I took him with me to the UK and we opened for James Taylor. One of the nights off he went to Piccadilly Circus and that’s where the song came from. I had no clue he was writing that material. He has a whole collection of these songs with great lyrics and unusual melodies.”

The album also showcases Suzy’s flawless vocals on a few standards by writers including Duke Ellington (“Do Nothing ‘Til You Hear From Me”), Nat King Cole (“Straighten Up And Fly Right”), and a couple of classics best known from recordings by Billie Holiday and Dan Hicks & the Hot Licks (“Comes Love” and “Sweetheart” respectively.)

“I wanted to sing a couple of standards but it was important to me not to record anything too terribly serious,” Suzy says. “All of these songs are subtle with a dry sense of humor or sarcasm.”

It wouldn’t be a Suzy Bogguss record without at least one of her compositions. She co-wrote “It’s Always New To Me” with Crider and Kramer.

“We were almost finished with the album when I decided to try my hand at writing this stuff,” Suzy says. “We needed three more songs and I wanted to record more new material than standards. Sometimes the swing chords intimidate me even though I know a lot of them. It was really fun to write this material, though.”

Now that the album is finally finished, Suzy is ready to hit the road and play the new music for her fans.

“I do think that my country audience will like this record,” Suzy says. “It’s nice and light and easy, and these days we can all use some of that. It’s the kind of music I like to listen to when I’m cooking, when I’m having guests over for dinner, when I’m relaxing on my patio. That’s what this music is all about for me. It fits my lifestyle and I think it fits many of my fans’ lifestyles as well. I love going new places as an artist and I love bringing my fans on this journey with me.”

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