**PETER COOPER** Welcome to Voices in the Hall. Presented by the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. Today: Part 2 of my conversation with Emmylou Harris.

**EMMYLOU HARRIS** When I had my first night of just sitting up til dawn, just playing music, it wasn’t sex drugs and rock and roll it was just music, and the joy of that, I think it was just the most fun the most alive that I’ve felt. Well that was what got me into music in the first place.

I still believe I have people from the very first record who are still coming to see me. I think I lost a few people along the way when *Wrecking Ball* came out. They thought I’d been abducted by aliens and replaced by someone they didn’t recognize. But it was all worth it.

I can’t imagine what it must be like for a young artist to have a huge hit all of a sudden and to keep that up. Mine has been kind of a really slow ascent.

**PETER COOPER** It’s Voices in the Hall. With Emmylou Harris

***“Wayfaring Stranger” - Emmylou Harris (Anthology / Warner Bros.)***

**PETER COOPER** That was “Wayfaring Stranger” from Emmylou Harris’ album *Roses in the Snow.* This is Part 2 of our conversation with Emmylou, recorded live at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum’s CMA Theater in celebration of our exhibit “Emmylou Harris: Songbird’s Flight.” Now as a teen Emmylou studied drama, not hillbilly music. Let’s hear from Emmylou herself.

**EMMYLOU HARRIS** My plans were to go to college and study drama. I was active in the drama program in high school. And I won a small scholarship to the University of North Carolina's drama program. But music was growing you know. It's just. It was not the kind of thing that you go to school for, and I thought well you have to go to college. You know it was that mindset.

**PETER COOPER** And you got that scholarship in part by competition.

**EMMYLOU HARRIS** Yeah I was Miss Woodbridge. That's right. I won five hundred dollars and there were six contestants. What can I say?

**PETER COOPER** What was it about drama that appealed to you and how did that then become an entry point into music?

**EMMYLOU HARRIS** I don't know if the two ever really intersected. They seemed totally different to me, oddly enough. In acting I was acting. And I believe that there are people who are brilliant actors who are in a zone when they're acting, you know beyond themselves, which I never felt. But in music it was totally different. I always felt it was it was going beyond oneself, almost losing one's self in the song the way a true artist as an actor can lose themself in a part.

**PETER COOPER** Emmylou eventually dropped acting for music, moved to New York City and started a family. She wound her way to Nashville, which proved to be a difficult transition.

**EMMYLOU HARRIS** I thought "I know a country song. I can make it in Nashville!" But I ended up, there was a restaurant, it's now the Golden Dragon but it was called the Mahi Mahi, and I ended up you know serving pupu trays and eating you know fortune cookies. So at one point I figured you know what this isn't working, so my husband and I you know agreed that we would break up. He went back to New York and I went to Maryland with with my daughter Holly.

**PETER COOPER** It was fortunate that not only did you have the support of your parents there in the D.C. area, but you also had this burgeoning acoustic music scene. And sometimes people assume that your first real immersion into country music was Gram, but I've heard living room tapes of you sitting around singing bluegrass songs.

**EMMYLOU HARRIS** That was with the Seldom Scene. And that was after I worked with Gram and Gram died and I came back to D.C. to just kind of figure out what to do with my life. John Starlin especially had a lot to do with saying, "You need to stay in D.C. you've got family, you have friends and you can figure out what you do in front of a friendly audience who already knows you from your folk trio."

When I was making my first record, we had done a track. And I had the vocal and I had the basic track. And I played "If I Can Only Win Your Love" for John and he said, "That's great." He said, "You need a really old-timey mandolin solo in there," which I think is what really made that song as special as it was. So many things, but I don't think there'd been a mandolin on a on a top five country record in years. And it gave it a certain authenticity. And of course we got Byron Bauerlein to play it. So all these little things that different people have added and supported me, inspired me, encouraged me, and certainly the folks in D.C. were a big part of that.

***“If I Could Only Win Your Love” – Emmylou Harris (Pieces of the Sky)***

**PETER COOPER** “If I Could Only Win Your Love,” from Emmylou Harris with Herb Peterson. Written by Charlie and Ira Louvin. That was Emmylou Harris’ first successful Country music single. From 1974 up until the 1990s, Emmylou fronted the Hot Band, a group that launched careers including Rodney Crowell and Ricky Skaggs, and that featured musical greats including James Burton, Glen Dee Hardin, and Emory Gordy Jr.

**EMMYLOU HARRIS** It was a truly wonderful group of people who, had a traveling had a traveling family with me.

**PETER COOPER** Even when people would fall out, I mean it's amazing the folks that came along later...

**EMMYLOU HARRIS** Albert Lee replaced James.

**PETER COOPER** Yeah. Ricky Skaggs came in after Rodney.

**EMMYLOU HARRIS** Replaced Rodney...

**PETER COOPER** Barry Tashian came in.

**EMMYLOU HARRIS** Barry Tashian came after Ricky left. We had Tony Brown after Glen Dee left.

**PETER COOPER** Steve Fishell.

**EMMYLOU HARRIS** Steve Fishell. John stayed. John Ware was the lynchpin, the drummer. It's been a long life.

**PETER COOPER** It's crazy though, it's like you got the first pick in the first round of every draft.

**EMMYLOU HARRIS** Pick of the litter.

**PETER COOPER** There was some sacrifice involved though having players like this out on the road.

**EMMYLOU HARRIS** It was a lot, cost me a lot of money. I went into, I think I was five hundred thousand dollars in debt. And back in the 70s that was a lot of money. But you know my manager Eddie believed in you know that was what you put your money into is what you love and what you believe. And he believed in that band. He believed in me. So it was like getting a loan from the bank and you know to bankroll this dream, this music thing that we had that we all knew it was very special. And ultimately, it took a few years but ultimately, royalties from those records paid back that debt.

**PETER COOPER** It's doesn't appear to the rest of the world to be a great business model is I'll go on the road for years and get heavily in debt in order to have these players. Usually it’s you wait till you are a star and then you can hire whoever you want. But the result of it seems to be that you could hold your own onstage with massively popular artists that you were playing with.

**EMMYLOU HARRIS** Well you know I guess thinking about it, I mean if you had a chance to go out with those musicians and somebody was going to give you the money to do it, wouldn't you do it? I mean I don't know, it just. I just went with the flow and I never felt intimidated. I was comfortable with those players from the very beginning. And for me, I just felt like I was part of the band. Like I would say, “Wow, I knew a lot of people were coming to see James Burton. And I thought that was fantastic cause I was there to see James Burton and hear James Burton too.” And and Rodney and I had so much fun, well the whole band. We literally had so much fun playing. We believed in what we were doing.

And we were still under the radar which was kind of cool. There's something about that. I think it's really hard. I can't imagine what it must be like for a young artist to have a huge hit all of a sudden and to start having to compete with themselves, with their record sales, with their audiences, with the size of their audiences and to keep that up. Mine has been kind of a really slow ascent. And I still believe I have people from the very first record who are still coming to see me, as well as fortunately because of other records like *Wrecking Ball* and things in my second life, musical life. They're joining in with that. I think I lost a few people along the way when *Wrecking Ball* came out. They thought I'd been abducted by aliens and replaced by someone they didn't recognize. But it was all worth it.

**PETER COOPER** And just for the record you were not abducted by aliens.

**EMMYLOU HARRIS** I'm not telling.

 ***“Orphan Girl” - Emmylou Harris (Wrecking Ball / Nonesuch)***

PETER COOPER “Orphan Girl,” written by Gillian Welch and included on Emmylou Harris’ groundbreaking album *Wrecking Ball*. This special edition of Voices in the Hall was recorded in front of a live audience at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum’s CMA Theater.

In the early 80s, Emmylou Harris moved to Nashville and she wrote an entire concept album with the great singer songwriter and producer Paul Kennerly. That album was called *Ballad of Sally Rose*.

**EMMYLOU HARRIS** You know I had the song ideas inspired mainly by my time with Gram. And Bruce Springsteen put out *Nebraska* which was a huge change for him. You know this basically a folk album. He had written the songs and put them on to demo'd them on cassette, and then apparently when he went in and put all the drums and the guitars and stuff he realized that they had lost their power and that those little crazy cassette demos had so much more meat and so much more power, they just put them out. And that's when I became a Bruce Springsteen fan, from *Nebraska*. And I just thought this is such a powerful thing and he's taken such a chance. If I don't write these songs, they're not going to get written unless I actually get off the road and and try to write them.

But there was another thing too. I had been asked by Albert Lee to be involved in a in a song cycle called *The Legend of Jesse James* which was written by Paul Kennerley, telling the story of Jesse James in song. And it was just one of the greatest things I'd ever been involved in. The songwriting was brilliant. There was a certain emotion to it. Levon Helm was involved, and Johnny Cash. But it was the songs. It was the songs and the way they told the story. And then I discovered he had done one before that told the story of the Civil War from a completely neutral, because he's from England, from an English schoolboy’s point of view of the Civil War, which was very romantic, you know the tragedy on both sides. And that was brilliant too. So I realized that I had someone who could actually, that maybe it wasn't a crazy idea to have a soundtrack without a movie. So I approached Paul and he was the one who we were able to to make that a reality.

***“Wish We Were Back in Missouri” - Emmylou Harris (The Legend of Jesse James / Mercury)***

**PETER COOPER** That was “Wish We Were Back in Missouri,” from *The Legend of Jesse James* album conceived by Paul Kennerly. In front of a studio audience at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, I asked Emmylou about the book she’s writing. Rumor is that she’s writing it in longhand.

**EMMYLOU HARRIS** I hate typing.

**PETER COOPER** Have you learned anything about yourself and your journey?

**EMMYLOU HARRIS** I've learned that I've lived a long time. And there's a lot to tell. I mean there's a lot in the sense that your life gets longer and there's a lot. But mostly what I've learned, which I always knew, is that my life has been incredibly blessed and that I'm grateful to a lot of people who are responsible for this blessed life, starting with my family, my parents and my family, my brother my cousins aunts and uncles, wonderful family that I was fortunate enough to be born into. And then all the musicians, producers, friends that I have met along the way that are still in a sense in my other family. I just I realize how important they are to each phase of my life or actually just each day of my life so. I'm glad for the opportunity hopefully shine a light on as many of these people as possible that I feel are so important to the fact that the only reason anyone would want to be reading about me is this blessed life and the things that have happened to me that I've been able to accomplish. But believe me, your life is not lived in a vacuum. It's so much about the people in your life.

**PETER COOPER** I think that's that's the way you've lived your life. And I think you receive a lot of love and loyalty in return. Nashville is a pretty peaceful town but if you want to get into a fight, walk into some bar and talk crap about Emmylou Harris.

**EMMYLOU HARRIS** What crap? I'd like to know.

**PETER COOPER** Emmylou Harris, thank you for being here.

**EMMYLOU HARRIS** Thank you Peter. Thank you everyone for making my day. And don't forget to vote. And please consider adopting a shelter pet.

***“Didn’t Leave Nobody But The Baby” - Emmylou Harris, Alison Krauss & Gillian Welch (O Brother, Where Art Thou? (Music From the Motion Picture) / Lost Highway)***

**PETER COOPER** That was “Didn’t Leave Nobody But the Baby,” Emmylou Harris, Gillian Welch and Alison Krauss from the *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* soundtrack, which sold millions and millions of copies.

This is Voices in the Hall. You’ve been listening to Emmylou Harris speaking in front of a live audience at the CMA Theater at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. Emmylou, the subject of our exhibition “Songbird’s Flight,” which covers the entirety of her remarkable career. And this is the end of the entirety of Season 1 of our Voices in the Hall podcast.

There’s more at [Voicesinthehall.org](http://voicesinthehall.org/) and on our social channels, @VoicesintheHall. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. This podcast is produced by the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum with Ben Manilla and Jennie Cataldo for BMP Audio. It’s recorded by Alan Stoker. I’m Peter Cooper, thanks for listening. Come see us at the Museum in downtown Nashville, Tennessee, Music City, U.S.A.