

BRANDI CARLILE: A VOICE WITHOUT LIMITS

Since releasing her first album in 2005, Brandi Carlile has boldly followed her own compass, making music so filled with country, rock, folk, and pop influences that it's difficult to place it in a single category. Over the years, she has steadily built a devoted following with her powerful voice, but her breakthrough didn't arrive until 2018 with her sixth album, which earned her national attention, three Grammys, and a fan base that now fills arenas.

“The only thing that I've really truly put my heart and soul into over the last twenty years has been being a live singer and a live communicator,” she said in 2018, “and bringing people together in a space where I can see them, and being a part of a movement—a live movement.”

Born June 1, 1981, in tiny Ravensdale, Washington, Carlile was the oldest of three children raised by blue-collar parents who listened to country music. As a little girl, she loved to imitate the big voices of country stars Patsy Cline, Tanya Tucker, and Wynonna Judd, and she first sang onstage at age eight. “As soon as I was old enough to do anything—talk, walk, throw a ball, whatever it was—I was already singing,” she says. When she was eleven, her musical interests turned to the pop-rock creativity of Elton John. Diagnosed with attention deficit disorder, she did poorly in school and dropped out during her sophomore year, at age sixteen, intent on a music career. With self-taught guitar skills, she made her way to nearby Seattle to earn money by “busking,” performing on streets and in other public places for tips from passersby.

In 1999, she met Phil Hanseroth and Tim Hanseroth, identical twins who were struggling hard-rock musicians, and the three formed a band under Carlile's name. Ever since, the three have built a unique partnership, writing songs together, splitting their earnings equally, and sharing a ninety-acre property in rural



Washington State where they all live with their families. Carlile says: “There is no Brandi Carlile without the twins.”

Carlile's voice has a remarkable range, and the songs she writes tend to focus on personal and often emotional topics. “It's about whatever puts the lump in my throat,” she says, “because that lump in my throat is a song.” Among her most memorable and heartfelt songs is “The Mother,” which she wrote about being the parent (with her wife, Catherine) of their first-born daughter. “I am not just a mother, but it's all that I am,” says Carlile.

Though her early albums were well received, Carlile mostly built her career on her riveting live performances. Then in 2018, producers Dave Cobb and Shooter Jennings finally found a way to help Carlile channel that live energy into her sixth album, *By the Way, I Forgive You*, and critics hailed it as her finest work.

Continued on back

LISTEN

“The Story,” “The Mother,” “The Joke,” “Crowded Table” (with the Highwomen), “Every Time I Hear That Song”

BRANDI CARLILE: A VOICE WITHOUT LIMITS (CONTINUED)

The album earned her Grammys for Best Americana Album, Best Americana Roots Song, and Best Americana Roots Performance.

Though her music straddles several genres, Carlile has felt most at home in the Americana and country communities. In 2019, she branched out to co-write and co-produce a Tanya Tucker album that won two Grammys, including Best Country Album. Also in 2019, she joined Maren Morris, Natalie Hemby, and Amanda Shires to form a country “supergroup,” the Highwomen, and a track on their debut album that she co-wrote went on to win a Grammy for Best Country Song.

Carlile continues to explore musical styles with little thought of how her work will be labeled. “If I could be anything to the music industry,” she says, “it would just be sort of a human eraser of lines between genres.”



CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. Describe Carlile’s connection to country music? When did it begin and how has it been a constant in her career?

2. What does Carlile mean when she says “lump in my throat” in paragraph four? Explain in your own words.

3. Why did the author title this essay “A Voice Without Limits”? Highlight words and phrases that support the author’s choice.
