

Caroline Herring



GOLDEN APPLES OF THE SUN

Biography

“We were recording,” recalls songwriter Caroline Herring, “when, right in the midst of a very intense song, a blizzard came through and dropped fourteen inches of snow all around us. I had never been in one before... now I think there’s a little blizzard in this record somewhere.”

Sudden snow showers are just one unfamiliar element Herring introduced to her creative process on her new album *Golden Apples of the Sun*, available October 27, 2009 on Signature Sounds. Daringly intimate and unguarded, the making of *Golden Apples of the Sun* took the Mississippi native far from her comfort zone, to striking effect. Long associated with the Austin, Texas music scene from which she sprang nearly ten years ago, Herring chose to record on unfamiliar turf – the Signature Sounds Studio in Pomfret, Connecticut – with only producer David Goodrich providing tasteful, understated accompaniment to her own delicate, intricate guitar. “On this record,” she observes, “I did none of the things that I’ve become comfortable with. I made it in a totally different part of the country, with a different kind of producer, and deliberately made it sparser. Still, I think it sounds like me.”

From her 2001 debut *Twilight* and its immediate successor *Wellspring* (2003) to the widely acclaimed *Lantana* (2008), Herring’s music has been hailed for combining traditional sounds with striking, original observations into modern life and love. The *Austin Chronicle* proclaimed *Lantana* to be “the best modern Southern Gothic album since Lucinda Williams’ *Sweet Old World*.” On *Golden Apples of the Sun*, Herring stakes out new terrain, exchanging the country-influenced sound of her previous albums for a darker, hauntingly personal sound inspired by the iconic female folk singers and songwriters of the 1960s and ’70s. “There’s no getting rid of my accent,” she says slyly, “but other than that, this is not a twangy record. It’s not roots-based.” The new record suggests that Herring has been as much influenced by classic songstresses such as Joni Mitchell and Judy Collins as by her native Southland.

Unusual for a songwriter as evocative as Herring, half of the material on *Golden Apples of the Sun* comes from other writers. Her artistry shines through, however, in her understated and surprising reinterpretations of songs, as well as in the choices of the songs she covers. “Song of the Wandering Aengus” by W.B. Yeats is a good example. “Every version I’ve heard is different,” Herring says. “I first heard Judy Collins sing it, and I loved it. Yet after listening to other musical arrangements of the poem, I realized that you could make the melody anything you want.”



With a confidence that reflects her musical maturity and originality, Herring performs a range of covers from pop (the Cyndi Lauper hit “True Colors”) to traditional blues (“See See Rider”) to the folk music that so strongly inspires her (Joni Mitchell’s “Cactus Tree”). The choices seem like strange bedfellows on paper, but filtered through Herring’s sensibility – stark, elegant, bittersweet – they settle in exquisitely alongside her original compositions, illuminating a new facet of her abilities as both a composer and interpreter.

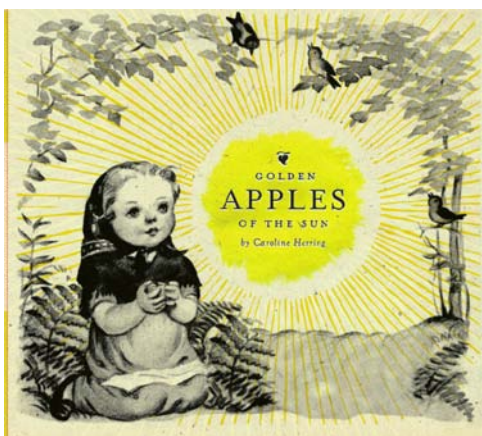
Noting her new take on “True Colors,” Herring admits that she was skeptical at first. “Goody suggested that I try a Cyndi Lauper tune, but I couldn’t figure out how to do one. We both loved the lyrics of ‘True Colors.’ As I was writing and rehearsing other songs, it kept coming back to me. Eventually I realized I could make this pop song my own. It’s moving, and so beautifully written. I suppose great songs have certain things like that in common, despite their different genres. It was similar with ‘See See Rider’ – that’s an old blues tune that I learned from Mississippi John Hurt and Ma Rainey. I didn’t feel comfortable trying to imitate them. So instead I honored them by taking the song in a new direction.”

The process of reimagining the outside material on *Golden Apples of the Sun* was akin to the work Herring pours into her own songs. “I’m a huge editor of the songs I write,” she explains. “My best songs are usually not on their first melody. Sometimes it’s not entirely finished until I sing it in the studio. I just have to keep working at them until they feel right – when I reach the point that I enjoy playing a song over and over.

“I’ve been working on the first song, ‘Tales of the Islander,’ for several years,” she continues. “The melody has changed a lot, the structure has evolved. It’s about Walter Anderson, a Mississippi artist whom I’ve always loved. He was a naturalist – and I’m not. It took me awhile to understand his world. I was intrigued with his long trips to the islands around Mississippi, and I wanted to know what he got out of them – what he saw. He was so thirsty for life, and when he was on a good jag, he was so aware and just drinking in everything at once. In the end, I built the song around this little cottage he lived in that no one was allowed to go into. After he died, his family went in and discovered – in addition to thousands of pieces of art – that he had painted magnificent murals on the walls. Each wall was part of a day’s cycle: sunrise, sunset...”

The spontaneity of Goodrich’s approach, combined with the direct and uncluttered arrangements, fostered an atmosphere where chances could be taken and new avenues could be readily explored. “Almost all my vocals were cut live,” Herring says, “which I had never done before. Most of the time it was me playing guitar and singing, and Goody playing alongside me on whatever instrument seemed appropriate. There were a lot of possibilities in that combination, and also a certain amount of flexibility. We recorded ‘The Wild Rose’ three different ways. The last time, we played it with Goody doing a slow piano part, and I sang it in a totally different way than I ever had sung anything. Then, our dear engineer Mark Thayer, said ‘Why don’t you make it sound like a Methodist hymn?’ The next take was the one.”

Paradoxically, *Golden Apples of the Sun* is both a departure from Herring’s previous work and her most personal and representative collection yet. “I’ve been gone from the alt-country world of Austin for seven years, and it just seemed like it was time for me to make a change,” she concludes. “It was the right time to launch out. On the road, I’m a storytelling folksinger, so it made sense for me to make that kind of record. I didn’t have an absolute idea of what it was going to be when I started. I just knew I wanted to get back into the studio and do something new and different while also representing my sound clearly and truly. The process, the material, however, was all so unusual for me. It’s not like anything I’ve done before...”



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**Caroline Herring Releases Fourth Album *Golden Apples of the Sun* on
October 27th
New Collection of Songs Is A Strikingly Intimate Follow-Up To Critically Acclaimed
*Lantana***

Nashville, Tenn. – Set for release on October 27, 2009 through Signature Sounds, Caroline Herring’s fourth album *Golden Apples of the Sun* is her most intimate and mature to date. Combining haunting originals with some surprising new takes on old standards, Herring has created an album that at once recalls the folk heyday of the 1960s and 70s while also sounding entirely fresh and new.

Herring has built a name for herself by crafting in-depth story songs, with critics continually describing her work as “timeless”, “pure”, “graceful” and “powerful.” Her last release, *Lantana*, was named by National Public Radio as one of the “Top Ten Best Folk Albums for 2008.” While critics and fans have long praised the purity and complexity of her voice, drawing comparisons to Joan Baez and Kate Wolf, the vocal performances on *Golden Apples of the Sun* are as comfortable and intimate as any Herring has produced. It is the most true to stage release of her career, and Herring gives credit to producer David “Goody” Goodrich, who crafted the stripped-down sound in the Signature Sounds studio in Connecticut. Armed primarily with just her guitar and live vocals, the finished product has all the marks of a fully developed artist and performer.

Emboldened by the critical acclaim of her recent work, Herring continues to create what *Vintage Guitar* has called “musical tapestries full of dark landscapes, bittersweet images, and otherworldly moments.” As usual, Herring draws inspiration from a wide range of sources. The album’s lead song “Tales of the Islander” is vintage Herring, an inspired and inspirational paean to the Gulf Coast folk artist Walter Anderson and the closing track, “The Great Unknown”, takes off from a passage from Dante’s *Inferno*. Yet Herring also includes beautifully crafted, intimate songs such as “The Dozens” and “Abuelita” drawn from her personal experience.

Perhaps the most unexpected aspect of the new album, however, is the tribute Herring pays to the iconic female songwriters and singers who influenced her. Herring’s work has always been identified with the traditions of her native South, yet on *Golden Apples of the Sun* Herring filters the sounds and inspiration of Joni Mitchell and Judy Collins through her own distinctive musical sensibilities.

Long-time Herring fans are sure to appreciate her evocative interpretations of Mitchell’s “Cactus Tree” as well as the traditional bluegrass tune “Long Black Veil” and the blues classic “See See Rider.” Herring also tackles “True Colors,” a song made famous by Cyndi Lauper, giving a newfound strength and directness to the pop song. These choices may seem like strange bedfellows on paper, but filtered through Herring’s sensibility – stark, elegant, and bittersweet – they settle in exquisitely alongside her original compositions. Sonically unguarded and daringly intimate, *Golden Apples of the Sun* continues a creative evolution that has solidified Herring as musician of consistent depth and resonance.

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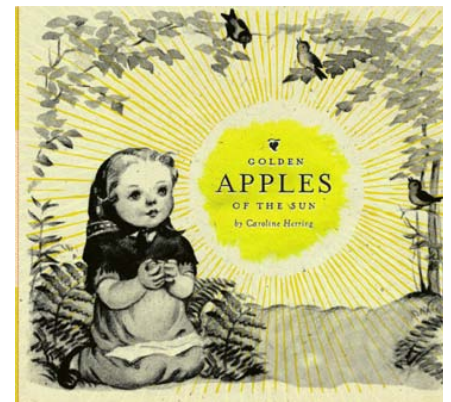
Caroline Herring



GOLDEN APPLES OF THE SUN

Song by Song

- ☞ **Tales of the Islander** – This song is about Walter Anderson, a prolific artist from the Mississippi Gulf Coast. When Anderson died, his family discovered that he had painted the interior of a cottage, one in which he often lived and worked, with beautiful murals. Each wall represented a time of day: sunrise, day, sunset, and night. I based my song on the progression of the cottage murals. Walter Anderson had a tremendous thirst for painting the natural world, and spent much of his later life on the islands off the coast from Ocean Springs.
- ☞ **A Turn upon the Hill** – When my children had their photos taken last year by a friend of mine, I could tell that my daughter felt nervous in front of the camera. This song is about her dance with this experience, and about her growing into girlhood.
- ☞ **True Colors** – At our first recording session, my producer David Goodrich suggested that I try a Cyndi Lauper tune, but I had no idea how to record one. We both loved the lyrics of ‘True Colors,’ and as I was writing and rehearsing other songs it kept coming back to me. Eventually I realized I could make this pop song my own. It’s moving, and beautifully written, and I tried to focus on the lyrics by slowing them down a bit.
- ☞ **Long Black Veil** – I used to sing this traditional bluegrass tune with the band *The Sincere Ramblers* at our weekly radio show in Mississippi. This is another alternate melody that came to me one day when I was noodling around in the sunroom. I initially expected the song to sound more delicate, but Goody pressed for urgency, and he got it. He also put a banjo in my hands and let me play like a mad woman, while he played the diddly bo.
- ☞ **The Dozens** – Several years ago I read a book called *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* by Lawrence Levine. In his book, Levine wrote about the dozens, an urban verbal game where people trade insults about each other’s mothers back and forth. The person who gets visibly angry first loses the game. Levine argued in his book that people played that game to steel themselves against the brutality of the larger world. I got to know Larry and his wife well when I lived in Washington D.C. a few years later, and I miss him and the real-life teacher that he was to me.



☞ **See See Rider** – One summer morning in 2008 I was trying to figure out how to play John Hurt’s “Louis Collins” when I let the CD run on and heard “See See Rider.” I’ve heard both songs a million times. For some reason, the latter stuck with me, and the alternate melody just came on.

☞ **Cactus Tree** – This is one of the first songs I ever learned. Somehow I got hold of Joni Mitchell’s *Blue* as early as high school, and later in college my roommates and I spent many hours listening to *Court and Spark*, *Clouds*, *Ladies of the Canyon*, *For the Roses*, and *Song to a Seagull*, as well as *Blue*, of course. No music has impacted me more than Joni Mitchell’s has.

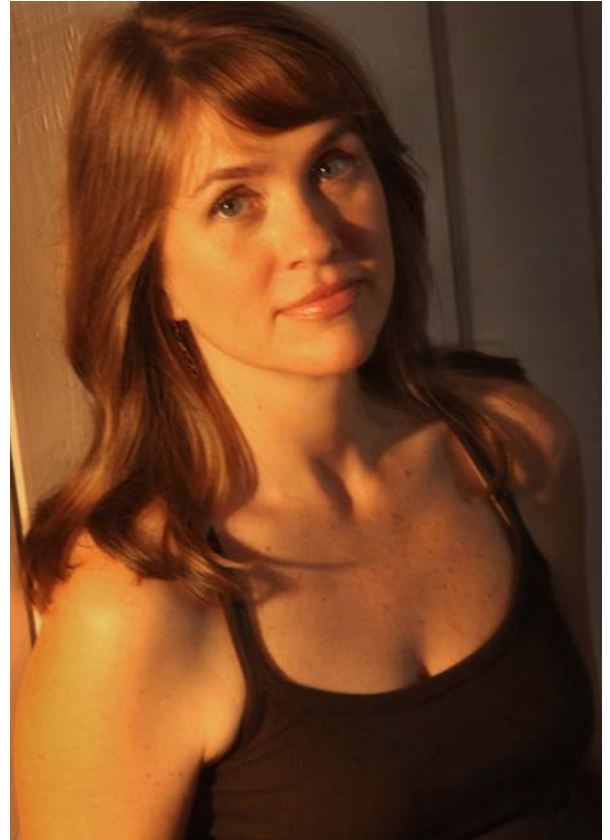
☞ **Abuelita** – My grandmother was born in Texas and raised in Costa Rica, where my great-grandfather was a beekeeper. After college she went to medical school in New Orleans, which was quite a feat for a woman in the late 1920s. While finishing her residency at a hospital in Mississippi, she met my grandfather, who was also on a residency. She dropped her career and followed him to Hazelhurst, Mississippi, where she spent the rest of her life raising five girls. It wasn’t until years after her death that my mother realized that grandmother spoke fluent Spanish.

☞ **A Little Bit of Mercy** – The line I like best from this song was written in the studio right before we recorded it. We all need a chance occasionally to “breathe in mountains and breathe out sun, for ourselves and this race we run.”

☞ **Song of the Wandering Aengus** – *The Song of Wandering Aengus* was written by William Butler Yeats in 1899. I first heard Judy Collins put this poem to music, and I fell in love with it. Since then I’ve heard other versions, every one with a different melody. Hearing those alternate versions taught me that one could play with new melodies set to already established lyrics, and in many ways that knowledge has served as the touchstone for this album.

☞ **The Great Unknown** – A group of friends and I gathered every few weeks for a year to read Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. I based this song on Dante and Virgil’s descent into the depths of Hell. At the bottom they have to climb over Satan’s body to exit. Because Dante, among others, thought that the world was flat, Dante and Virgil didn’t have to go far before they were out of Hell altogether, and their first post-Hell visage was a magnificent sky full of stars. I just love that image.

☞ **The Wild Rose** – I compiled the lyrics for this song for a friend’s wedding. She sent me *The Wild Rose* by Wendell Berry. I love Wendell Berry’s work, and I love the poem, yet I thought, “You want me to sing this message at your wedding?” So I pulled a book of love poems by Pablo Neruda off the shelf and read *The Light Wraps You*. The poems seemed to resonate with one another.



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