

Mp3 Donna Hughes - Gaining Wisdom



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Bluegrass/Americana album produced by Tony Rice and featuring guests like Alison Krauss, Mary Chapin Carpenter, Rhonda Vincent, Wayne Benson, Scott Vestal, Sam Bush and Sonya Isaacs. 14 MP3 Songs COUNTRY: Bluegrass, COUNTRY: Country Folk Details: Whatever moves me, moves me to write, explains emerging songwriter, vocalist, and multi-instrumentalist Donna Hughes. For Hughes, songwriting is an all-consuming endeavor, encompassing all that goes on around her. My songs are always about something I have seen, done, or felt or something that I saw someone else do or go through. There is always truth to every song I write, even if it isn't my truth. Since she first began writing songs a little over a decade ago she has composed over 250, recording over half of them. Her songs have been recorded by Alison Krauss and Union Station (My Poor Old Heart from Lonely Runs Both Ways) and the Seldom Scene (Sad Old Train, to be released on an upcoming project). Twelve of her originals, along with two unique covers (including Cyndi Lauper's Time After Time), compose Gaining Wisdom, Hughes' first nationally-released album. The album was produced by the legendary Tony Rice, and features contributions from an elite group of supporting musicians and harmony vocalists such as Alison Krauss, Mary Chapin Carpenter, Rhonda Vincent, Carl Jackson, and Alecia Nugent. In Donna, Rice says, I heard something that was down to earth, with a definitive southern flavor to it. And yet there was something different about her voice and the way she structured her music that implied a more flexible, adventurous approach. The resultant sound of Gaining Wisdom is deeply influenced by both Rice's progressive acoustic sensibilities and Hughes' own wide-ranging musical tastes. I love all genres and styles of music, Hughes says. My dad loved country and bluegrass, and we shared that. My mom is a classical pianist and loves classical and orchestral music. I loved Elvis when I was a little girl, while in college my friends were into Tori Amos. She is a big inspiration to me, as are Norah Jones, Vanessa

Carlton, and John Mayer. Also, I've been teaching gymnastics since 1989, so I am forced to listen to whatever the kids and teenagers wanted to hear at the gym, which led to a fondness for reggae, rap, hip hop, and pop. All the while, Hughes cultivated a love of acoustic music born of hearing the bluegrass bands brought in to perform at her local church as she was growing up. Raised in a closely knit family in tiny Trinity, North Carolina, Hughes pursued music from an early age, picking out tunes on the family piano at age three and, in her words, annoying my parents all through my childhood by singing all over the house! I never sang in front of an actual audience until 1996, in church and I was scared to death. Around that time I started looking for places to sing. I would drive several hours to sing one cover song at a barn dance, or a country music hall. I sang every chance I got. Despite earning a B.A. in History and embarking on a career in real estate (with a sideline as a gymnastics coach), music was never far from her mind. She began writing and recording in earnest in 1996, cutting an album's worth of songs that proved to be more of a learning experience than a career-builder. Continuing to write relentlessly, Hughes spent five years gathering material for her first bluegrass album, 2001's *Somewhere in Time*. That album picked up word-of-mouth buzz and won her a devoted following among both bluegrass fans and critics, and was followed by the twenty-one track collection *Same Old Me* in 2003. Union Station bassist Barry Bales heard a track from *Same Old Me* on WNCN's bluegrass program, and brought Hughes to the attention of Alison Krauss, who quickly became a fan of Hughes' powerful, insightful songcraft. The album also brought Tony Rice into the fold. I was over at the home of my friends Steve and Kathi Fox, he recalls, and they had *Same Old Me* on the hi-fi. After a few songs, I had to ask, "Who is that?" The more I listened to her music that day, the more I heard in it. The idea of producing an album of hers intrigued me. As a performer, she has great flexibility. She could sit down at a really good Steinway at one venue, and the next night play guitar in front of a straight-ahead bluegrass band. This makes producing her a great challenge: you want to illuminate what is recognizable and classic about her music to make clear her very strong ties to bluegrass while remaining true to what is so special about Donna. Shortly before Christmas of 2003, Donna recalls, I received a phone call out of the blue from Tony Rice. He asked if he could produce my next album. It amazed me at the time, because my car CD changer was filled with Tony Rice albums! It was such a welcome relief to get recognition from such an extraordinary musical hero, after all of my hard work. Despite the presence of a large selection of A-list musicians, it is Hughes' versatility as a performer, coupled with her profound gifts as a writer, that makes *Gaining Wisdom* such a

consistent revelation. Hughes songs are emotional, yet are grounded in experience and reality making them both moving and believable. Gaining Wisdom opens with the bittersweet One More Time, a song reflecting upon the happier days of a fading relationship, which features the harmony vocals of Alison Krauss and Mary Chapin Carpenter. Through the years, Hughes says, I was heavily influenced and inspired by the music of Alison and Mary Chapin. I never dreamed that they would one day sing on my album. The song boasts a relaxed rhythmic groove, which Rice feels elevates the resonant poetry of Hughes lyrics. Songs like One More Time are complemented by more straight-forward bluegrass-leaning performances, such as Where Are You, Darlin?, Scattered to the Wind, and the riveting Bottom of a Glass. The latter is one of Hughes most heartbreaking compositions, a stunningly fresh take on the dangers of alcoholism in which Hughes rather than condemning her subject outright creates a sympathetic portrait of a tragedy-bound young addict. She has the rare ability, raves Union Station bassist Barry Bales, to take song topics that others have overdone and write about them from a new perspective. While Hughes is a strong rhythm guitarist, piano was her first instrument, and producer Rice was insistent that it play a part in Gaining Wisdom. Donna sent me demos of songs shed written, Rice recalls, and sometimes shed play them on the piano. Piano is not a standard bluegrass instrument, of course, but the more I heard her piano playing and how it colored her songs, the more I liked it and the more I felt it had to be heard on this album. Hughes learned to play classical piano by listening to her mother perform pieces by Bach and Beethoven and then learning them by ear. I think being exposed to classical music has helped me to construct more innovative-sounding bluegrass chord progressions, she remarks, that is different from your run-of-the-mill three-chord patterned songs. Her knack for composing in minor keys is immediately evident on the haunting Father Time. The subject of times passing is one that fascinates Hughes. We are bound, motivated, and controlled by time, she says. I hope the dark sound of Father Time might remind the listener to stop, and be more grateful of each moment, each day. Hughes sees different instruments as a means of stimulating different approaches and perspectives in her songs. When I speak at songwriting workshops, she says, I like to tell people to write songs on as many different instruments as they can play. Write in a different room sometimes, or borrow someone elses instrument. I get different ideas and feelings when I sit at the piano at Hilltop Studios in Nashville, than I do on my grandfathers old piano at home. Her quest to continually uncover new perspectives is what makes Hughes so remarkable as both a writer and performer, and why she has been referred to by

the renowned bluegrass/country writer and producer Carl Jackson as One of the best new singer-songwriters in the world of bluegrass With fellow maverick Tony Rice at the helm, Gaining Wisdom makes a powerful statement from an artist who has only just begun her career.

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