

MINDY SMITH

Taking chances is paying off for one of Americana's most distinctive talents

"THE RISK IS PRETTY INTENSE, BUT IT'S WORTH IT."

Mindy Smith is discussing the realities of navigating the music industry as an independent artist. Her new self-titled album is her first after parting ways with Vanguard Records in 2010. "The opportunity to go indie presented itself when my contract was up," Smith says, "and it felt right to move forward and take ownership of what I do. It's been this buildup that's happened in the last two years. I just needed more leverage in terms of my music."

An Americana Music Association winner, Smith first earned praise for her version of Dolly Parton's "Jolene" on 2003's Parton



Fairlight Hubbard

tribute album *Just Because I'm a Woman*. But Smith's oeuvre is based on her own songwriting, something she had a hand in on every song on the album. Although the recording process was completed in three days, the album includes compositions from various stages of her career. "There's a contrast on this album," she says. "It has songs that I've recently written and songs that I'd written years ago, back in the early 2000s. Those songs came from kind of a naive approach to writing, without that professional influence to steer things. I'd attempted to do 'Tin Can' and 'Cure for Love' in the past, but they never had the right energy until now."

Smith leaned on co-producer Jason Lehning for musical support, and the album features contributions from Nashville's most seasoned players including guitarist Bryan Sutton, bassist Lex Price and pedal steel guitarist Dan Dugmore. That spirit of collaboration was necessary as she chose to explore her different impulses in

the studio. "My push to writing is, if it's interesting to me, it can be interesting to the audience," Smith says. "It's a natural process for me, but I have done exercises to expand my creativity and move past my limitations, like trying to write songs for specific genres."

With a loyal following in her corner, Smith doesn't worry about the commercial pressures that concern many of her peers. Citing Parton and John Prine as her role models, her chief focus now is touring in support of the new music. "My goal is to be out on the road playing music in my 60s," she says. "You have to want to put up with the grind. It's not glamorous, but there's this need to be out there performing." Smith also relishes the opportunity to strengthen her bond with fans. "It's important to respect people who invest in my music," she says. "I have such a diversity in my audience, it runs deep and wide. We all have some amazing stories to share."

—Blake Boldt

