

# BRENDA LINTON

As the only daughter of Southern parents reared in poverty, Brenda Linton became aware at a young age of her mother's dreams for her – that she would have red hair and would sing and dance like Shirley Temple. Today, although the petite redhead has some great moves on the dance floor, she is best known for a voice so pure and melodic that fans have dubbed her the “Carolina Nightingale.”

Born in Washington, North Carolina, Linton says she was raised by “a passel of kind-hearted women, including my mother, grandmother, maternal aunts, and housekeepers who treated me as their own.” Her mother overcame childhood polio to train as a registered nurse and began working at the county hospital when Linton was still an infant.

Raised in a Baptist orphanage, her father was a major source of strength and understanding in later life. But in her early years, his work as a master plasterer frequently took him away from home, even to the island of Bermuda. “Part of my dad's compensation was a month in paradise for my mom and me,” says Linton of the experience, “and I guess my love of the road began there.”

The singer/songwriter is taking to the road again to promote her first long-player and indie debut, “THE SECRET.” The album's 12 songs reflect a range of genres from her earliest influences of roots and classical music to her coming-of-age with folk and protest songs to more recent affairs with jazz and gospel. Co-produced and mixed by John Plymale (Squirrel Nut Zippers, Claire Holley, Caitlin Cary), “THE SECRET” is a showcase of Linton's talents as a guitarist, pianist, writer, arranger, and producer. “John knows how to draw the best out of musicians,” says

Linton of her co-producer, “He helped me to get comfortable and to use my personal history to really feel what I was singing.” Using a combination of live recording and overdubbing, Linton and Plymale supported her emotive playing with lush background vocals and a rich palette of lead instruments, including mandolin, penny whistle, harmonica, fiddle, electric and slide guitar, dobro, and saxophone.

Although Linton remembers hearing lots of music during her early childhood, her formal education began at the age of eight when her parents bought her a Wurlitzer spinet and a set of classical piano books. She demonstrated a quick aptitude for music and, encouraged by her piano teachers, took top honors in juried competitions at the nearby university and won lead parts in school musicals and plays.

By adolescence, Linton had developed a list of favorite singers (Perry Como, Paul McCartney, Joan Baez, and Joni Mitchell) whose influence would later emerge in her unique vocal style. In high school, she taught herself to play guitar and formed a duo with a girlfriend that expanded into a folk trio called the *New Horizon Singers*. By her mid-teens, Linton was performing regularly in college coffee houses.

After graduation, she joined an established folk-rock group called *Warm*. Linton's voice as well as the innovative harmonies and original songs provided by the other three members set the band apart from most local acts in eastern North Carolina. For two years, she was able to earn a living performing throughout the southeast in music clubs, rock festivals, and college venues, and opening concerts for recording artists such as the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band and Rare Earth.

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When *Warm* broke up, Linton decided to pursue her childhood dream of living in Europe. She traveled in Switzerland, Italy, and France before settling in London. She established a musical relationship with another songwriter and recorded demos that were nibbled at by a British record label but the deal eventually fell through. Meanwhile, she supported herself by working in pubs, Carnaby Street clothes shops, and betting establishments.

While in London, Linton also tried some new directions which were short-lived, including singing with a heavy metal band. Homesick and lonely, she turned to songwriting. “During that period, I wrote songs to try to understand myself better,” Linton recalls, “and I wrote songs about stories I heard from the people I met.” One of these, an account from an Irish friend about a supernatural encounter, would later become the title song for “THE SECRET.”

The six original tracks on “THE SECRET” demonstrate Linton’s skill at creating provocative music that touches both heart and mind. *Bargain Love* and *The Good Life* provide opposite views of the same phenomenon – how living a borrowed life only alienates us from ourselves and others. The jazzy *Quiet Love* touts the wisdom of finding our own answers rather than relying on popular culture.

*Warriors* and *Still in This World* are perhaps the most personal songs on the album and movingly express the depth of Linton’s sorrow at losing her mother to breast cancer in 2004 as well as the belief that there is still much to recommend the world - a belief made more poignant by her own triumph over the disease a year earlier.

The tune for *Warriors* was written by Thomas Walsh, a gifted composer and multi-instrumentalist living outside Dublin. “I happened upon his lovely melody, *Innisbeer*, and knew it would be the perfect complement for my lyrics,” says Linton. “When I called him to get permission to use the tune, he was at home with the flu; but he was very gracious and we found we had a lot in common. Music often allows perfect strangers to quickly get down to the important stuff.”

Since the singer/songwriter returned to the United States, she has performed and recorded with a variety of musicians and producers in several locales, including Nashville. For over a decade, she was a member of the *Angelettes*, a three-woman vocal group whose harmonies brought much delight to listeners as well as the singers themselves.

Most recently, she has collaborated with musicians and songwriters in the Chapel Hill/Durham area, many of whom contributed to “THE SECRET.” One of her biggest thrills has been finding opportunities to play with her brother and youngest son, talented musicians in their own right.

Linton feels lucky to have been given the resources to perform and record music that she believes in. And while singing will always be the first love of the Carolina Nightingale, these days her passion is to continue to evolve as a songwriter. “These songs describe the many ways that love manifests in life - with both painful and joyful results,” says Linton about her album. “Even so, everyone has thoughts and experiences that are very private and only surface indirectly. And it’s that mysterious territory that I love to explore.”