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Radney Foster Blends Rock and Redemption on New Album, *Revival*

Guests Include Dierks Bentley, Jack Ingram and Darius Rucker

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Radney Foster

Fifteen years ago, [Radney Foster](#) was dating Cyndi Hoelzle, a Nashville-based journalist who would often make him "Saturday night/Sunday morning" mix tapes.

"On one side, it would have all the honky-tonk Saturday night songs," he recalls. "If it was a country thing, it would have [Buck Owens](#), [Merle Haggard](#) and all this honky-tonk stuff, and the other side would be all the hymns and gospel things they had done." For example, you might get the feisty innuendos of "Tiger by the Tail" followed in short order by the quiet reverence of "In the Garden."

Needless to say, the formula worked. He and Hoelzle have been married for 13 years, and he draws on that same "Saturday night/Sunday morning" concept on his revealing new album, *Revival*.

"I know musically there are times when it's certainly gospel flavored, and there are certainly gospel themes on the whole thing, and I would say there are even two or three gospel songs on it, but it's not really a gospel record," he says. "My hope would be that someone of no faith, Christian faith, Jewish faith, Muslim or anything in between would listen to it and say, 'Oh, OK, I get it.'"

Foster wrote the rousing opening track, "A Little Revival," with two of his closest friends, Jay Clementi and Darrell Brown. (A stripped-down version closes the album.)

"We all come from different parts of the political spectrum," Foster says, "but we all come from a place of faith and really different walks of life. We said, 'What does everybody need? What does this country need? What do people need?' Then we started talking about revival. I started singing it -- 'Hallelujah, a little revival!' It just took off from there."

Indeed, it still does. The album's soul-baring second track, "Forgiveness," gives way to a party anthem, "Until It's Gone," with [Dierks Bentley](#) singing along. "Trouble Tonight," written and performed with [Jack Ingram](#), was written after Foster tried to convince his wife to go skinny-dipping. Naturally, it segues into "Shed a Little Light," complete with gospel singers who are ready to testify.

"I think he is just very honest," Ingram says of Foster. "He isn't afraid to lay himself out there and talk about being in love and talk about getting hurt and everything in between. The things that are interesting about songwriters are the highs and the lows."

During the making of *Revival*, recently released on his own label, Foster enlisted director Jeff Horny to film a 90-minute documentary about the album as well as his life. Certainly, his life story has its share of twists and turns.

As one half of [Foster & Lloyd](#), Foster climbed the country charts in 1987 with a peppy hit single, "[Crazy Over You](#)." Plus, many artists from that era were hitting the Top 10 with his compositions, too, including [Holly Dunn](#), [the Forester Sisters](#), Sweethearts of the Rodeo and [Tanya Tucker](#). In 1992, Foster landed his own Top 10 solo hit, "[Just Call Me Lonesome](#)," followed a year later by "[Nobody Wins](#)."

However, by the mid-'90s, his singles barely charted. He was divorced from his first wife who took their son, Julian, to live with her in France. That time in his life is reflected in "Forgiveness," one of the most eloquent songs on the album.

"We had to figure out how forgive one another and go on and be parents," he explains. "Sometimes that's harder, and sometimes it was easier. That's what sparked that. You can walk around hating somebody, but you're the only person that really gets hurt out of it."

Foster also mourned the loss of his father, John Radney Foster, in 2008. The song was written a month later with Clementi, who was also grieving the loss of his grandmother. Foster says they both found catharsis in the

collaboration.

Now, Foster's life is back on the upswing. Julian enrolled in Nashville's Belmont University this fall. And the songwriting credits have piled up again: Dierks Bentley's "Sweet and Wild," [Brooks & Dunn's "Again,"](#) [Kenny Chesney's "Somebody Take Me Home,"](#) the [Dixie Chicks' "Never Say Die"](#) and "Godspeed (Sweet Dreams)," [Sara Evans' "A Real Fine Place to Start,"](#) Jack Ingram's ["Measure of a Man,"](#) [Gary Allan's "Half of My Mistakes,"](#) [Pat Green's "Three Days"](#) and [Keith Urban's "Raining on Sunday,"](#) to name a few.

Urban himself has declared Foster's 1999 album, *See What You Want to See*, as his favorite album ever. Foster's still actively writing, too, after signing a new contract with Sea Gayle Music, a publishing company co-founded by Chris DuBois, [Brad Paisley](#) and Frank Rogers.

[Darius Rucker](#) says he heard one of Foster's newest songs and called him personally to reserve it for his next album. As lead vocalist for [Hootie & the Blowfish](#), Rucker previously recorded two of Foster's compositions -- "A Fine Line" and "Before the Heartache Rolls In."

"He is by far my idol in country music," Rucker says. "When I open my mouth to sing country music, I try to be Radney Foster. There's no two ways about that. For me, today, he's about as country as anybody. When you listen to a Radney Foster record, you know you're listening to a country record."

For *Revival*, Rucker sang harmony on "Angel Flight," a spiritual ballad about National Guard pilots who fly their fallen brethren home.

"I've never shied away from the fact that I am a person of faith," Foster says. "But I've never been overt about it either. When I had a couple of watershed moments in my life, it all sort of happened at once. You know, my dad died, but my son is coming home from France after 13 years and going to be a freshman at Belmont. You've got these highs and lows on the rollercoaster of life, and it can't help but make you reassess."

Now that the record is done, he's asked if his head is a lot clearer.

"Oh, yeah!" he replies, before immediately changing his mind. "Well, I take that back. I think my heart's a lot clearer. I think my soul has a little more peace than it did before, but I think my head is about to pop off because there's so much work to be done."