



Radney Foster pays homage to veterans with 'Angel Flight,' has Beachland Ballroom date on Friday, Nov. 20

By Chuck Yarborough, The Plain Dealer

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Singer-songwriter Radney Foster returns to the Beachland Ballroom with a new album of his literate but never boring Americana music.

CONCERT PREVIEW

Radney Foster

When: 8 p.m. Friday, Nov. 20

Where: Beachland Ballroom, 15711 Waterloo Road, Cleveland.

Tickets: \$15 in advance, \$17 day of show, available at the door, by phone at 216-383-1124 or online at beachlandballroom.com.

Radney Foster has always been one of country music's most literate songwriters. With his latest effort, the fact-based "Revival," and one cut in particular, the Texas native who plays Beachland Ballroom on Friday, Nov. 20, has proven he's also one of the most emotional.

"**Angel Flight**" is named after the designation for the Texas Air National Guard C-130 that transports the bodies of Guardsmen slain in combat.

It came about partly because Foster's co-writer on the tune, Darden Smith, and Lt. Col. Jim Nugent, who works for the **Texas National Guard Support Foundation**, both had a hankering for ice cream from an Austin institution: Amy's Ice Cream.

Amy's has several locations, and one just happened to be around the corner from another Austin landmark, Waterloo Records, where music fan Nugent had just bought Smith's latest CD.

"Darden begins a relationship (with Nugent) and begins to start thinking about having talks with the Texas National Guard about songwriting. He's thinking at this point that it's to help guys cope with PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) issues and re-entry issues," Foster said in a call to his home outside Nashville.

Smith learned about "Red River 44," a mission in Iraq in which seven Texas National Guardsmen died when their Chinook helicopter crashed outside Tallil, Iraq. "In the midst of these conversations, the Guard told him about . . . this thing they call 'Angel Flights.'"

The songwriter bell in Smith's head went off, and a couple of weeks later, when he was in Nashville and visiting Foster.

"He tells me the story and says, 'Are you interested?' and I said, 'Oh, my God, are you KIDDING? Absolutely! So we write this song after dinner one night," Foster said. "Immediately I knew I had to record that song."

At that stage, "Revival" was essentially complete. Smith sent a heavily orchestrated version to Foster, who opted to remove almost all the other instruments. The end result is a bare-bones, gut-

wrenching, emotional song with poignant but not syrupy lyrics, the kind of song at which Foster excels.

"That was my hope," he admitted. "I wanted you to feel that sense of the last verse: *'The cockpit's quiet and the stars are bright / feels kind of church like here tonight.'* And I wanted that feeling through the whole song."

A **video of the song** went out today in an email blast to mark Veterans Day.

"All of that is a Guard unit out of Grand Prairie, Texas," Foster said. "I had the wonderful and yet hard opportunity to sing 'Angel Flight' at the service for the dedication of the memorial for the Red River 44," he said.

"It's a lightning rod moment for me," Foster said, quietly. "I watched the general bend down to children my own children's ages and hand them a folded flag for their father's memory. I still don't know how I got through that."

The song is perhaps the central piece in "Revival," but it's by no means the lone quality tune on a CD where all -- not some, all -- of the songs are true. It is a vintage version of Foster's ability to merge gospel, rock, blues and country with perhaps the most literate songwriting in any genre.

From the title track, which has the ring of a Texas tent revival, to the homage to his late father that is "I Know You Can Hear Me," to the sweet surrender of a father whose curses turn to prayer when his 2-year-old son is lying in a hospital room, "Revival" captures the raw honesty in Foster's heart.

Can we get an amen?