

The Tennessean

## Radney Foster explores faith, doubt on 'Revival'

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**Radney Foster's** new album started when he was a college freshman, taking a required comparative religions class.

"They made you read this guy Paul Tillich, and the deserts west of Del Rio are not anywhere near as dry as Paul Tillich," said Foster, 50. "But I had to read it, so I read it. And there was a section in there where he wrote about how doubt is an integral part of faith, and if you don't have doubt, you can't have faith. That was directly opposed to what I'd heard growing up in a small town, and so it really hit me when I read that. I thought, 'Oh, then I guess I'm OK.' "

Foster's latest work, *Revival*, is an exploration of the nature of faith, doubt, forgiveness and redemption, and it comes in the wake of some major changes for the artist.

One song, "I Know You Can Hear Me," is about the death of his father, while the title track is filled with a sense of hope and healing that Foster says is due to the return of his 17-year-old son Julien, who moved with his mother to France when she remarried.

"When Julien left, I became a real good fly fisherman," Foster said. "He'd come back for spring break or for Christmas, and then after we put him back on the plane I'd go fish by myself. That was my day to go yell at God. There was a lot of anger, but I realized that I had to find a way to get rid of that, because it'll destroy you. There's a song on this album called 'Forgiveness' that I really wrote for Julien's mama, because we both had to figure out how to forgive each other. With hate and anger you can't be an effective parent."

It's a good time for Foster

Julien is now living with his father in Nashville, playing guitar and attending college, and Foster cannot tick off these and other facts without grinning. It's a good time to be Radney Foster. He's as busy and productive with writing, recording and touring as he was in the 1980s, when he first came to popular notice as half of hit

country duo Foster & Lloyd, and he is regularly cited as a prime influence by artists such as **Keith Urban** and **Darius Rucker**. He's also cited as a forerunner of the Americana movement, and he'll perform this week as part of the **Americana Music Association's** conference.

"I was a part of that thing that happened in the 1980s and early 1990s, with people like **Steve Earle**, **Nanci Griffith**, the O'Kanes and others, when there was some really neat stuff coming out," he said, laughing at Earle's description of that Music City time as country music's "Great Credibility Scare." "I guess maybe all that was the birth of what they now call 'Americana,' and we just didn't know it at the time."

Foster & Lloyd disbanded after three studio albums, and Foster signed a solo deal with Arista Records that found him notching country hits such as "Nobody Wins" and "Just Call Me Lonesome." He also recorded an album called *See What You Want To See*, which didn't burn up the country charts but which found him writing with directness about a difficult time in his life. The album is a favorite of Urban's, and the country star recorded a hit version of *See What You Want To See's* "Raining On

Sunday.”

“*See What You Want To See* was born out of huge transitions,” Foster said. “My son left and went to France, and I was a newlywed. My first year of marriage, we went through a custody trial. It was a roller-coaster ride. The best records I’ve made have been about big transitions. Great art comes from tribulations, and great love comes from that, too. That doesn’t mean the other records aren’t good ones, but they aren’t as visceral as *See What You Want To See*, or *Revival*.”

*Revival* was released on Sept. 1 via Foster’s own Devil’s River Records, and Foster is well aware that starting a record company at a time of commercial upheaval in the music industry brings on a Tillich-approved combination of faith and doubt. But he and his band, the Confessions, have a healthy touring schedule lined up for the fall, early reviews of the album have been quite positive and a documentary about the making of the album is earning attention as well.

All in all, things seem fine, especially on long days at home, when he can spend the late afternoon cooking

dinner for the family and listening to some favorite new music: Julien's songwriting demos