

Lissa Hanner

When singer-songwriter Lissa Hanner moved to Colorado as a teen, she immediately knew she was home.

“When I was 15, my dad’s company transferred him to Colorado Springs, and I was thrilled because I was in love with John Denver and I just knew Colorado was where I belonged,” Hanner recalls. “I was so happy.

“I fit right in, you know, I just fit in,” she continues. “I love the mountains. I love the way I feel when I look at the sky and the trees. I was meant to be here, I just knew it.”

That move from San Diego to Colorado Springs was the beginning of a long musical journey that ultimately led to her latest album, *My Colorado*, Hanner’s heartfelt tribute to people and places in the state she loves so dearly.

Hanner had a dream of being a singer and a songwriter, and it wasn’t long before she was hitching rides into town to perform. “I started playing in bars when I was 15 years old,” she says. “I would hitchhike with my girlfriend — we would do it just for fun — and we met this guy and he got us playing in the bars in Colorado Springs.”

At that time, Hanner was primarily performing cover tunes. “I would write a song here and there, but I never really took myself seriously as a songwriter until I moved to Nashville.”

Nashville was the third stop she made after she decided to see what the world beyond Colorado had to offer. Traveling with a friend, she checked out California before landing in Knoxville, Tenn. From there, she leapfrogged over to Music City.

For the first few years she lived in Nashville, Hanner was half of an alt-folk duo, The Landladies, performing all-original material. Later performing solo, she was a regular at all the top songwriting haunts, like The Bluebird Cafe, Douglas Corner and 3rd & Lindsley. She also participated in the Country Music Hall of Fame’s long-running program, Words & Music, in which songwriters go into the public schools and compose music to accompany lyrics written by the students.

While living there, she met and married her husband Gary Hanner, and it wasn’t long before they welcomed a daughter to the family. As she watched her daughter grow, she began to long for Colorado.

“My daughter was getting older and I wanted her to be in the mountains,” Hanner explains. “Plus, I didn’t fit in in Tennessee. You know I worked at Ruth’s Chris [Steak House] and they fired me because I didn’t wear enough makeup,” she says with a laugh.

“I just never felt at home in Nashville — but I love Nashville, I love the energy.”

So around the turn of the new millennium, Hanner and her family packed their belongings and returned to the Centennial State, settling in Guffey, a little town 60 miles west of Colorado Springs. “The town is basically two blocks wide, it’s small,” Hanner says. “It has two bars and a cafe – it’s a happening little town.”

Lissa Hanner cont.

Even though she left Music City, Hanner did not abandon her music. In fact, being back home stimulated her creativity. “My influences were Joni Mitchell, Judy Collins, Carly Simon, Neil Young, all the harmony stuff,”

she says. “Those were my influences, but after moving to Nashville, I got into country, of course, and the songwriting was huge for me then. But moving back here to Colorado was like coming full circle. I was that girl again, living in the mountains, writing songs about the places I love and the people I’ve met.”

Over the next decade, she performed regularly in local clubs and released two albums — one collection of covers titled *It’s My Mother’s Fault* and an album with her brother Chuck Binkowski Jr. called *30*, featuring 30 songs — 28 originals — which they had recorded at various studios over the years.

The nine original songs included on her new release, *My Colorado*, were written over the past decade. “For the past 10 years, I’ve been saying I was going to do a Colorado album,” Hanner explains. “Finally, I had enough songs to put together a Colorado record.” In addition to the original tunes, the album includes a cover of one of her favorite songs as a child, John Denver’s “Rocky Mountain High.”

With her brother along to lend a hand with production and electric guitar, Hanner made several trips to Nashville in the first half of 2012 to record the album. They cut the basic tracks at a studio called Jay’s Place, then finished the record at Turner-Up Recording, owned by multi-instrumentalist and studio wizard Robby Turner, whose extensive studio vitae includes work with Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, Paul Simon, Gin Blossoms, John Prine and Steve Forbert. Turner overdubbed various instruments, then mixed and mastered the album.

“Robby really pulled it all together,” Hanner says. “I was lucky because he was in between projects at the time.”

My Colorado is more than a love letter to Hanner’s home state, it is a testament to her growth as a writer and recording artist. “This is the first album I feel like promoting — because I’m really proud of it,” she enthuses.

“We basically did all the *It’s My Mother’s Fault* recording ourselves [at her home studio], except for a few tracks in Denver, and I learned so much,” she continues. “Because of *It’s My Mother’s Fault*, this record is way better — and I think my next is going to be even better still.”

But before she gets to her next record, Hanner plans to spend the first half of 2013 traveling throughout her home state, performing and spreading the word about *My Colorado*.

“I’m hitting the road,” she says with a wide grin on her face. “I’m getting in my car and I’m driving up-and-down the entire state.”