

Carolyn Wonderland Bio

A musical force equipped with the soulful vocals of Janis and the guitar slinging skills of Stevie Ray, Carolyn Wonderland reaches into the depths of the Texas blues tradition with the wit of a poet. She hits the stage with unmatched presence, a true legend in her time.

“She'd grown up the child of a singer in a band and began playing her mother's vintage Martin guitar when other girls were dressing dolls. She'd gone from being the teenage toast of her hometown Houston to sleeping in her van in Austin amid heaps of critical acclaim for fine recordings *Alcohol & Salvation*, *Bloodless Revolution*, and most recently, *Miss Understood*.

Along with the guitar and the multitude of other instruments she learned to play – trumpet, accordion, piano, mandolin, lap steel – Wonderland's ability to whistle remains most unusual. Whistling is a uniquely vocal art seldom invoked in modern music, yet it's among the most spectacular talents the human voice possesses.

That vocal proficiency was well-established in the singer's midteens, landing her gigs at Fitzgerald's by age 15. She absorbed Houston influences like Little Screamin' Kenny and soaked up the Mad Hatter of Texas music, Doug Sahm. The Lone Star State was as credible and fertile a proving ground for blues in the 1980s as existed, especially in Austin with Stevie Ray Vaughan & Double Trouble, the Fabulous Thunderbirds, Angela Strehli, Omar & the Howlers, and Lou Ann Barton all in their prime. By the following decade, Austin's blues luster thinned, but Houston, always a bastion of soul and R&B, boasted the Imperial Monkeys with the effervescent Carolyn Wonderland as ruler of the jungle.

In the early 1990s Wonderland & the Imperial Monkeys were invited to the Guadalupe Street Antone's in Austin. There, they were treated like royalty with the singer as the queen of hearts in the club's post-Stevie Ray Vaughan stable, which included Toni Price, Johnny and Jay Moeller, Sue Foley, Mike and Corey Keller, and the Ugly Americans. It was a good bar for the Monkeys to hang, and Austin felt so comfortable that when the band called it quits a few years later, she set her sights on Austin at the start of the millennium.

Living in Austin renewed Carolyn Wonderland's focus on her multiple talents, underlining luxurious vocals with fine guitar work, trumpet, and piano, as well as that remarkable ability to whistle on key. A series of each-better-than-the-next discs began with *Alcohol & Salvation* in 2003 ("songs about booze and God; records are a time capsule of what happened that year"). Her music played in television series such as *Time of Your Life* and *Homicide*.

Her circle of musician friends and admirers broadened to include not only Ray [Benson, who produced *Miss Understood*] but also the late Eddy Shaver, Shelley King, and yes, Bob Dylan, who likened her composition "Bloodless Revolution" to "a mystery movie theme." She began co-writing with locals Sarah Brown, Ruthie Foster, Cindy Cashdollar, and Guy Forsyth; sat in with Los Lobos, Robert Earl Keen, and Ray Wylie Hubbard; recorded with Jerry Lightfoot; and toured with Buddy Guy and Johnny Winter. She also claims membership in the all-girl Sis Deville, the gospel-infused Imperial Crown Golden Harmonizers, and takes aw-shucks credit for inspiring Amsterdam's annual WonderJam.

It was magic in the studio, too, as *Miss Understood* came to life, a canny mix of Benson's production, Wonderland's compositions, and select covers of Terri Hendrix, J.J. Cale, and Rick Derringer that punched her sound up a notch. As soon as the album roared to life, it was clear the singer-songwriter-guitarist-whistler had delivered on her long-awaited promise.”