

Episode Title: Caitlyn Smith's Soulful Songwriting

Episode Description: In this week's episode, Sid Evans, Editor-in-Chief of Southern Living Magazine, talks to one of the most exciting young talents in country music, singer, songwriter, and musician, Caitlyn Smith. They discuss the email to Patty Griffin that helped kick off her career, her introduction to Southern Food, and how she fell in love with songwriting. Plus, Caitlyn recalls the first time she heard the recorded version of "You Can't Make Old Friends," the hit song she co-wrote for Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton.

Episode Transcript:

(Biscuits and Jam Theme begins - Fiddler's Barn on Epidemic Sound)

Voice over from Sid Evans: Welcome to the Summer Tour edition of Biscuits and Jam, from Southern Living. I'm Sid Evans, editor-in-chief of Southern Living Magazine. My guest today is the incredible singer, songwriter, and musician, Caitlyn Smith, who's made a name for herself as one of the most exciting young talents in country music. Caitlyn grew up in the small town of Cannon Falls, Minnesota, where her Sundays were spent singing in church or enjoying the land of 10,000 lakes, but in the last decade she has left an indelible mark on Nashville. Today, we talk about memories of helping her mother cook at their family's bed and breakfast, how she fell in love with songwriting, the email to Patty Griffin that helped kick off her career, and her introduction to Southern food. Plus, Caitlyn recalls the first time she heard the recorded version of "You Can't Make Old Friends," the hit song she co-wrote for Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton. All that and more this week on Biscuits & Jam.

(End of theme music)

Sid Evans: Well Caitlyn Smith, welcome to Biscuits and Jam.

Caitlyn Smith: Hello, Sid, thank you so much for having me.

Sid Evans: (laughs) it's great to see you again. The last time I saw you was in 2016 and you were performing for a Southern Living event up in New York, with some other Nashville songwriters, do you remember that?

Caitlyn Smith: Yes I do, absolutely. I remember vividly the very- very good southern food that was going on in the room.

Sid Evans: Yeah- (laughs)

Caitlyn Smith: Do you remember that? The samples-

Sid Evans: ... of course.

Caitlyn Smith: ... happening. Could never forget. But, no, that was so much fun, I loved that.

Sid Evans: That was fun. and I had not heard you sing before and I was just completely floored. And I remember, one of the songs that you sang that night was Tacoma.

Caitlyn Smith: Yes. (laughs)

Sid Evans: ... which is just a gorgeous song. It ended up being recorded by Garth Brooks.

Caitlyn Smith: Yes. Oh, I love that song so much I grew up listening to Garth and it's absolutely crazy to me that he recorded that song. I was sitting in a session one day in Nashville and my phone, like, made a little ding and I was, like, "Oh, what is this?" And I, kind of, just looked at it and it was an email from Garth. He's, like, "This song ..." and I was, like, "What?" He's, like, "Can I please record this song, ~~uh~~, I'm obsessed with it." So I was, like, "What? Okay, absolutely, Garth." And that really kicked off a friendship, which is so great. Him and Trisha are some of the best people that I know and I love them so much, so yeah. (laughs)

Sid Evans: Wow, well hard to turn down Garth I suppose.

Caitlyn Smith: Absolutely. (laughs) But I did, you know, I love this song too, and so I did release my own version on my debut record, Starfire. It's one of my favorites to play at my shows as well.

Sid Evans: Well, I just hope you'll keep singin' it because I still have a clip of it on my Instagram and I just, love that song, really.

Caitlyn Smith: Thank you.

Sid Evans: So Caitlyn, you grew up in a small town in Minnesota, is that right?

Caitlyn Smith: That's correct.

Sid Evans: Cannon Falls?

Caitlyn Smith: Cannon Falls. population 3,000, -I grew up behind a baseball field and grew up singin' in church. It was just a cute little ... I think of my childhood and I was, like, "That was pretty cute." (laughs) Great place.

Sid Evans: That's gonna sound very cold to the southern audience.

Caitlyn Smith: It is cold. I think when I flash back to my childhood, I only have remembered the Minnesota summers, and have completely blocked out the trauma of Minnesota winters. I don't like to go there, it's the worst.

Sid Evans: Well, so tell me a little bit about that town what was it like growin' up there as a kid?

Caitlyn Smith: Yeah. Um, I loved it. I mean Minnesota is such a beautiful state, a beautiful place to grow up. It's the land of 10,000 lakes and so really anywhere you grow up in Minnesota you are a hop, skip, and a jump from a lake. And so, a lot of Sundays were spent going to church and then we'd go spend the day on the lake. It just was lovely. I loved growing up in a small town. It was one stop light. We had, kind

of, this old school downtown that was like a bakery and a hardware store, like, it's just so cute. (laughs) And, um, what I loved growing up in Minnesota, and in a small town in particular, was that it really gave me an opportunity to try things in music. You know, I started singing as a little girl, and singing at little county fairs, and coffee shops, and things along in the area, and it just was, like, it felt very safe and I felt very, like, free to just, try things, and experiment, and- and gig around as a kid, (laughs) which is very cool.

Sid Evans: Well, you mentioned church. Were some of your early gigs in church? I mean, was that a place where you, kind of, discovered singing?

Caitlyn Smith: Yeah, absolutely. You know, I grew up in, kind of, a traditional Lutheran church and so I was raised on, like, the hymns which I think just really instilled such a passion for, like, harmony. I always loved to learn all the parts. (laughs) And then, um, you know, as I grew up we switched churches and went to a more, like, modern scenario with a band. as a teenager I got this opportunity every week to just go play my guitar and sing some songs. And what's great about that, kind of, opportunity as a kid is, like, you can totally suck and it's a safe place- (laughs) to do that. (laughs) but I just feel grateful that there was, like, a place that was very safe to experiment and be able to just, like, learn music and perform,

Sid Evans: You know, I can't tell you how many people come on this podcast who grew up singing in church and-

Caitlyn Smith: Yeah.

Sid Evans: ... that was really a, kind of, a launching pad-

Caitlyn Smith: Yeah.

Sid Evans: For them in a lot of ways.

Caitlyn Smith: Totally. It's really cool. And I mean, as a kid, I remember just being so inspired by these old hymns because there's something, like, in the melodies that are so intriguing and- and the way that the old songs are written. Like, that's some of the first music I really had in my heart and soul and there's something so wholesome and ... I can't quite put a word on it, but it definitely drew me to music at a very young age.

Sid Evans: Did you have a favorite hymn?

Caitlyn Smith: Great is Thy Faithfulness.

Sid Evans: Hm.

Caitlyn Smith: The melody, wow.

Sid Evans: So, Caitlyn, what did your folks do for a livin'?

Caitlyn Smith: My dad was a police officer for 31 years and my mom, she did a few different things. for a while my parents owned a bed and breakfast and so for probably five years of my childhood I spent living in a bed and breakfast, like we lived in the top floor, the bottom floor, and every week I'd get to play music for them on the piano, practice my piano. And- and it was such a, like, a fun thing to, like, grow up in this community with a revolving door, right? And then my mom went on, like you know, it just got to be really busy and she, kind of, got sick of the innkeeper's life. And so she works at a school, as a para, with kids with disabilities and they're just good people. I feel grateful for my parents. So, they've always been-

Sid Evans: Mhmm.

Caitlyn Smith: ... very supportive and great folks

Sid Evans: You know, I was gonna ask you if you grew up around cooking, and, of course, you did at a bed and breakfast, I mean that was just-

Caitlyn Smith: Yes.

Sid Evans: ... a part of every single day, I guess.

Caitlyn Smith: Absolutely.

Sid Evans: What was that like?

Caitlyn Smith: It was so much fun to learn all of these recipes, and there was a recipe book that was with the bed and breakfast that the innkeepers have passed along. And, so, you know, I would wake up every summer morning to the smell of bran muffins, or blueberry muffins, and my mom made this ridiculous egg bake. And it was such a beautiful memory because I would help her, like, plate the breakfasts, and then bring them out to the guests. And we'd use the good china, you know, and so it's just such a, such a fun memory that I have with my mom of, getting to help her prepare this beautiful breakfast and the check in desserts, you know, (laughs) and so, it definitely instilled, like, a passion, for cooking and I now just love to have people over to my house and do that same thing, and I think it was a lot because of that.

Sid Evans: Yeah, I've heard you say that you're a pretty avid cook. What do you like to cook?

Caitlyn Smith: It depends on the season, right? if you were coming to my house I'd probably just roast a chicken, and make some really delicious vegetables, and a nice crisp salad,

Sid Evans: ... I'm free this weekend. (laughs)

Caitlyn Smith: Okay, good, come on over. I love making the whole chicken, 'cause it's such an experience. and then I always take the bones and make bone broth, and then turn it into something else the next day, like a curry or a soup. yeah, I love to cook, (laughs) as an artist that tours, I'm always on the road. I love to try out new restaurants, and that's a really fun part about my job, you know, is getting to, like, try out different food in different cities. But there is something that's really soul filling to just come home, and be in my own kitchen, and be able to be creative with cooking something. it's just a different way to use your creativity, and it really is, like, therapy for sure,

Sid Evans: Yeah, you know, I had Trisha Yearwood on this show who's almost as-

Caitlyn Smith: Yes.

Sid Evans: ... well-known for her cooking as she is for her singing. And, she talked about how it was a different, kind of, creative outlet for her-

Caitlyn Smith: Yeah.

Sid Evans: ... and it was a way to do something for people, She said it fed her soul and, she couldn't imagine life without it,

Caitlyn Smith: I fully relate to that. I should go get some coffee with Trisha and we could talk about (laughs) her recipes, I'm sure. (laughs)

Sid Evans: (laughs) Well, so, Caitlyn let's talk about music for a second. I mean, did you grow up with a lot of country music in the house or music in general?

Caitlyn Smith: We always had a radio on in my house, music was a constant. but it was, kind of, changing. a lot of country music, 90s country, so, listened to a lot of Garth and Trisha, Martina McBride, Allison Kraus was, like, my first, favorite record. but also my dad listened to a lot of classic rock, my parents love, like, songwriters Paul Simon, and Carole King, it just really was a lot of different music all throughout my childhood.

Sid Evans: Well, so, you've got this unbelievably beautiful voice,

Caitlyn Smith: Thank you.

Sid Evans: ... but you're so well known for your songwriting. When did you start to write your own songs and kind of discover that?

Caitlyn Smith: Yeah, I mean it's something I started experimenting with around eight or nine years old. I was really super into country music and was just curious, like, "How do they write these songs?" And so I just, kind of, started trying it and then I just loved it, and I didn't stop. So by the time I was, like in middle school, I had written a bunch of my own songs. And I somehow conned my best friends to be in a band with me, and I was like, "Okay, we're gonna play some covers, but we're gonna play my originals." (laughs) And so it was just something that I loved to do, I love to create and make stuff up. Honestly, I don't think I'll ever stop. I think I'm gonna write songs until the day that I die. (laughs)

Sid Evans: I sure hope so. Well, was there one song that you wrote that, kind of, felt like a breakthrough that felt like, "Wow, okay, I'm onto something here."

Caitlyn Smith: I used to do this thing called the Minnesota State Fair every summer, and I would try out some of my original songs. And one year, I think I was, I was 15 years old, and I played an original song, just me and a guitar, and it, like, we got to the finals and I won the whole thing. (laughs) But winning that whole contest and getting to play in front of 15,000 people and having people come up and be, like,

"Well I want a copy of that song," I feel like that was the moment of a, "Oh, people are connecting with whatever this is that I'm writing." it was called I Found You, and just a simple little love song. And I would say that would be the song that really changed it all for me. (laughs)

Sid Evans: How did it go?

Caitlyn Smith: Oh man.

I found you [inaudible] bad.

No I know it's true

I cannot remember it, but it was good. No. (laughs)

I found you or something like that. It's like a little country ditty.

Sid Evans: Well you might need to record it. (laughs)

Caitlyn Smith: I'm gonna need to find it. Honestly if I go back and listen to it now, it was my 15 year old self, I'll probably cringe to the max. (laughs)

Sid Evans: So, did this set in motion, your kind of Nashville idea, (laughs) like it might be time to start thinking about a move to Nashville if I'm gonna be serious about this?

Caitlyn Smith: Yeah, it really did. I mean, so, I went and I recorded that song and did it, like, a little independent record it really did set the ball in motion. We met some random person who was from Nashville and they invited us down to come check it out. and I really fell in love with Music City on that trip. I remember discovering Music City and seeing, like, "Wow, it's a incredible town that's full of people like me that want to do this music thing that's so cool." But what I didn't realize that I would find was that it's songwriter city, and that there's this whole-

Sid Evans: Hm.

Caitlyn Smith: ... job out there where people just make up songs. And I thought, "Dang, this is the coolest thing." I found really quickly, like, you can have the best voice in the world, but really, what sets you apart, and gives you a long career, I was seeing, was great songs. That's really what I wanted to focus energy into and so I started taking trips back and forth, every handful of months and eventually made the move down to Nashville, a handful of years later

Sid Evans: So how old are you when you're in that van with your mom on that first trip?

Caitlyn Smith: Yes, I was 15.

Sid Evans: Wow.

Caitlyn Smith: Yup-

Sid Evans: So this was right after the state fair thing.

Caitlyn Smith: Right after the state fair thing, we made the record. And really that solidified it for me, that it's, like, that trip made me go, "I want to live here, I want to be here. I don't need to go to college mom and dad, I'm just gonna write songs," and they're, like, "Okay." which I felt so grateful that they were, like, "What's your plan," I spent the le-, next couple of years just tryin' to graduate high school as soon as possible, and gigging on the weekends, and (laughs) I had my mind made up that it was Nashville or bust,

Sid Evans: So you get to Nashville and I'm wonderin' if there was an early gig in Nashville that, kind of, stands out for you good or bad- (laughs)

Caitlyn Smith: Yeah, for sure. I remember one of the first gigs I played in Nashville, and the only reason why I knew about it is 'cause I was a huge huge fan of this artist, Patty Griffin. And I was just-

Sid Evans: Oh sure.

Caitlyn Smith: Looking online, like where is she playing next, how can I go see her? And I saw she was playing this festival, so I found an email, I emailed them, I was like, "Do you guys need a, another artist, an opening act?" And I remember they're, like, "Yeah, we do, we listen to your Myspace, it's great." Like, (laughs) I just remember getting the gig, off of MySpace. I drove down there, and I played on this flatbed trailer with hay bales all over it, and pumpkins. and there was only a couple people there, but it got me in the door. I met some Nashville folks in there and made some lifelong connections just from that hay bale gig (laughs) back in the day.

Sid Evans: When you get there, you're this person who loves to cook, and grew up in a bed and breakfast, but you don't know anything about southern food.

Caitlyn Smith: Right. (laughs)

Sid Evans: ... Tell me a little bit about that learning curve and whether you had any help, getting to know southern food, learning how to cook some of it.

Caitlyn Smith: I only had a small little intro. My great-grandma made some really good fried chicken. I feel like that's a staple of southern food, right, fried chicken.

Sid Evans: Sure, oh yeah.

Caitlyn Smith: But, honestly, I didn't know, I didn't know the extent of southern food until I went to this thing called a meat in three. I've never been to a meat in three, I didn't even know what people were sayin'. It was a place called Monell's and it actually is family-style, and you sit down, and they pass all the food, and you get the biscuits with the cheddar in them, and, like it's just so much gravy. I remember this day very vividly, because I remember being, like, this is insane, this is, like, so heavy but outrageously delicious. I was tryin' to write a song that day with a couple friends and we're, like, "Let's go to Monell's instead and maybe the idea will hit us over southern food," right? So we stuffed ourselves to the brim, and we went back and we could barely move, we're, like, "Wow." And I was thinkin', I think I really outdid myself, I should've really paced myself in this (laughs) southern eating. But the cool thing was, is we were jamming away and a song showed up, we wrote it that day, and it ended up being, um, the first cut that I ever got on an artist named Jason Aldean, So, my first real intro to southern food I think inspired my very first songwriting cut- (laughs) cut, which is really cool.

Sid Evans: Now that is a good Biscuits and Jam story.

Caitlyn Smith: Isn't that crazy? It's crazy. (laughs) Have you ever been to Monell's in Nashville?

Sid Evans: I have not, no.

Caitlyn Smith: I mean, it's just ... You just want to have, like, Thanksgiving dinner, southern style, and gain five pounds to go there. (laughs) It's the best.

Sid Evans: All right, that's goin' on the bucket list.

Caitlyn Smith: Yeah, it's great. (laughs)

(Instrumental music break of Biscuits and Jam theme)

Voice over from Sid Evans: I'll be back with more from Caitlyn Smith after the break.

(AD BREAK)

(Instrumental music break of Biscuits and Jam theme)

Voice over from Sid Evans: Welcome back to Biscuits & Jam, from Southern Living. I'm Sid Evans, and today I'm talking with singer-songwriter, Caitlyn Smith.

Sid Evans: So Caitlyn, you hadn't been in Nashville that long when you had a pretty big hit that you wrote for Dolly Parton and Kenny Rogers. and it probably seemed like you'd been there for a really long time, but this was back in, I think, 2012 or so?

Caitlyn Smith: Yeah- yeah.

Sid Evans: It's called, You Can't Make Old Friends. And, I've gotta imagine that that was a surreal moment for you. How did that happen and what did that mean to you at the time?

Caitlyn Smith: I mean, it still is surreal, even hearing you say it back. it's hard to wrap my head around, that, those two legends recorded this song. And I just feel grateful for the entire thing. So when I first moved to Nashville my publisher introduced me to this incredible songwriter named Don Schlitz. And Don is a hall of fame songwriter, he's written some of the best songs in country music from When You Say Nothing At All, to the Gambler, to Forever and Ever Amen. Like, I call him Yoda. (laughs) And so my publisher set me up with Don and he really became a mentor for that first year bein' in Nashville. so we wrote a bunch of songs and the story of You Can't Make Old Friends was that Don is being inducted in the Songwriter Hall of Fame, and Kenny Rogers came up to him and said, "Hey, Don, I have this song title, I'd love if you could write it for me." Kenny tells him the title is You Can't Make Old Friends and Don says, "Okay." And then the next week I happened to have a session on the books with him, and go to his house, and he's, like, "How'd you like to try and write a song for Kenny Rogers today," and I was, like, "All

right, let's try it." So, as a writer you just dream of, The sky opens up and the song writes itself, you know. And so we wrote the song, and sent it to Kenny, and we didn't hear anything back for I think it was six months, eight months, then you know, we go onto hearing through the grapevine that he recorded the song. to celebrate 30 years since the release of Islands in the Stream with Dolly, he wanted to duet with her one last time, and they cut the song together. And I literally just get chills, like, (laughs) even re-telling the story. I remember the A&R person at Warner Brothers, at their record label getting a copy of the master and- and calling me that day. She goes, "You have to hear this. Where are you?" she drove to my house and she had it on, like, a CD (laughs) Walkman thing, (laughs) and she put the headphones on my ears and she's, like, "Listen to this." And I just remember that first moment of hearing Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton, like singing this song that I wrote with my dear friend and it's just, I, a moment I'll never ever forget

Sid Evans: And it ended up being, kind of, a farewell song-

Caitlyn Smith: Yeah.

Sid Evans: ... for them. I mean it was one of the last things that they sang together

Caitlyn Smith: It's incredible. But have you seen the music video for it?

Sid Evans: Yes.

Caitlyn Smith: It's marvelous. It's so beautiful and there's, like, a little interview that goes with it and I mean they're legends, and I just feel insanely grateful to have a tiny piece of the story, it's very cool. (laughs)

Sid Evans: What a great story and a great song.

Caitlyn Smith: Oh, thanks.

Sid Evans: So you're back in Minnesota now.

Caitlyn Smith: Yes.

Sid Evans: ... but, you know, I heard you say somewhere that living in Nashville really changed you and I'm just curious what you meant by that.

Caitlyn Smith: Wow. well I think it was really formative, it was a formative time. I moved to Nashville when I was 23 years old. My husband and I got married - two Minnesota kids moved straight to Nashville. It absolutely changed me. I mean, what an incredible opportunity to live in a city that eats, sleeps, and breathes music. I definitely moved to Nashville fairly naïve in thinking, "All right I'm gonna move here, I'm gonna write some songs," but really I wanted to move here and be an artist. And I thought, "Heck, I'll just take a couple meetings and get a record deal." I say that because I think I didn't realize how difficult it would be too. And so there's the piece where it's, the community made me, But, it also, as an artist, it's hard to hear no, it's hard to have doors closed, it's hard to hear no a billion times. Like everybody's doing music, but it's kind of built on luck too, right? You just hope that you'll get that lucky cut, or that one person will be at that one show and you'll get your record deal, or whatever it is. It's hard not to be jaded after a handful of years of living here. And so there's a-

Sid Evans: I'm sure.

Caitlyn Smith: ... piece of that too. That also makes me who I am. And it's a love-hate relationship for sure. It's, like, I, I'm obsessed with this city, but it also breaks my heart. I write songs about it all the time. (laughs)

Sid Evans: Well, so, you wrote a song called I Can't-

Caitlyn Smith: Yeah.

Sid Evans: Which you recorded with Old Dominion and Matthew Ramsey's been on this show before. And

Caitlyn Smith: Awesome.

Sid Evans: It talks a lot about change and-

Caitlyn Smith: Yeah.

Sid Evans: ... how hard it can be.

Caitlyn Smith: Yeah.

Sid Evans: And there's actually a scene in the video that you made for it where you're crying. What was on your mind when you wrote that song?

Caitlyn Smith: Yeah. I wrote that song after livin' in Nashville for a handful of years and see ... I was driving by downtown Nashville and I was seeing, like, the skyline is just littered with a billion cranes and 16 new skyscrapers and, like, that's where the first lines of the song came, like, "This is ain't a 20 minute town no more, it don't look the same." Like, all that is just talking about the change that I've watched the city go through. Because when I moved here there was, like, three restaurants that you could go to if you wanted a fancy dinner. Like, it was a sleepy little town, right? And so I've- I've watched this city change. But then also, I myself have changed as a person. I've had friendships and relationships come and go in my life and just e- evolved as a human. I wrote it to, kind of, sound like a breakup song, but it really did, it speaks a lot deeper, so just the change that I've gone through. I was so, so pumped that Old Dominion decided to join me on the song and add their magic, and making the music video was so- so fun, because it gives you an opportunity to then show another angle and thought. And, so, in that scene where I'm, crying it was actually pretty easy to go there because it was, it was, like, right in the middle of, like, pandemic land and we made the video to bring awareness to save our stages [inaudible 00:31:53]. And, how we haven't been on the road in a year, and, like, so it was really easy to get to the tears. (laughs)

Caitlyn's song, "I Can't" comes in and we hear the following at full volume then fades out:

*All the time and the whiskey I've wasted
That I ain't ever getting back
Oh, I've tried to find the courage just to face it
But I can't, I can't*

*And I'm tired of you feeling like a stranger
Over and over again
Oh, when everything around me keeps changing
But I can't, I can't, I can't*

Caitlyn Smith: Those tears are real (laughs) in the video.

Sid Evans: Well, I believe it. And that song came off of an album called Supernova.

Caitlyn Smith: Yeah.

Sid Evans: That was going to be a really big moment for you. It was gonna be a tour, all these interviews and the release date was March of 2020. (laughs)

Caitlyn Smith: Yeah, March 13th, lucky Friday the 13th. (laughs)

Sid Evans: Not good timing.

Caitlyn Smith: No.

Sid Evans: ... so, that had to be a bit of a gut punch-

Caitlyn Smith: Yeah.

Sid Evans: For you, when everything-

Caitlyn Smith: Yeah.

Sid Evans: ... got called off.

Caitlyn Smith: Yeah, it really was. I mean, you spend two plus years or more of your life pouring your life into making a record, right? And you try and pick the truest stories and the best songs, right, and then, and then all the anticipation of, like, getting excited to release it. I definitely mourned that record. And, I think I expected a lot from it and just like everybody else, probably expected a lot more (laughs) from 2020, or a lot different things from 2020. It was a gut punch, I mean to be able to then, like, not get to bring this art in a way that I wanted to other people it was hard, for sure, but we did it. I mean I got to a place where I'm, like, "Oh, it's okay, I can't control this, and whoever needs to hear this record and find these songs will find it," and I was able to let it go, but it took a minute. (laughs)

Sid Evans: (laughs) I'm sure. Well, Caitlyn, you have a new song out called High which sounds, kind of, like a breakup song. And it builds from something that's very, sort of, contemplative to something very emotional and powerful.

Caitlyn Smith: Yeah.

Sid Evans: What was the story behind that song and how did that come together?

Caitlyn Smith: Well, I wrote that song with my good friend, Jen DeSilvio. I had started the lyric just sitting on my bed in a hotel in L.A., downtown L.A. and was just really thinking of, as an artist, the emotional roller coasters that I go to and where I get my inspiration. And- I brought this idea to- to Jen and she knew exactly where to take it in the chorus where it's, like, we have these people in our lives that make such great impressions on our hearts and on our souls. And- and even if we've moved on from them, it's, like, 'cause sometimes you think about them and you're, like, "Wow, that was crazy," or that was whatever, insert feeling here. And so it was really just, writing on a memory. We finished the song and- and it, kind of, made its way through the music business and somehow someone passed it to Mark Ronson, who then showed it to Miley Cyrus and she just fell in love with the song. And so she recorded it on her Plastic Hearts record. Now after writing High, I- I knew right away, I'm, like, "This is my song, this is, like, a story I'm diggin' in the back of my brain for." And so when she asked for the song I was like, "Yes- yes- yes please." (laughs) I love to hear her version of it too, and it's just, it's so cool when you create something that someone else connect, like another artist connects with enough that they want to be able to sing it every night. it's honestly the highest honor

Caitlyn's song, "High" comes in and we hear the following at full volume then fades out:

And you, like a neon light

Shining through a door that I can't keep closed

And you, you're like a rolling stone

Always building cities on the hearts that you broke

And in my head I did my very best

Saying goodbye, goodbye

Sid Evans: Well and she did a- a different version of it,

Caitlyn Smith: Yeah, totally.

Sid Evans: So when you sat down I'm sure you just had something completely different in your head-

Caitlyn Smith: Yeah.

Sid Evans: ... when you sat down to record it.

Caitlyn Smith: Totally. And it, and it was so cool because, the songs on this last record, as I was writing it I really was hearing the music so vividly and- and especially in a song, like, High I wrote that song, just on a guitar, but I could hear all of the production, the background vocals, the big drums. writing a song like that, kind of, unlocked this thing inside of me, that made me very curious about trying out production and self-producing a record. And so, this whole last record I decided to, kind of, take this risk. And, there aren't any other females, at least in the country circle, that I know of that have just self-produced a record, so it was a little scary for me. I'm, like, "Whoa, nobody really does this..." so there must be a reason, I don't know. That's because it's terrifying. (laughs)

Sid Evans: (laughs) Would you do it again?

Caitlyn Smith: I would, because man, isn't it, kind of, thrilling to do scary things? Wow. And didn't ... I grew so much in that process, like, I grew leaps and bounds in making this record. Learning how to trust myself, learning how to tune out all of the outside voices sharpening my ears. Like, I feel like I could write

a book on the thing, the lessons I've learned in doing it. And so, man, well, I definitely would do it again, 'cause how much fun (laughs) was that? (laughs) It was awesome.

Sid Evans: Speaking of things you would do again, would you tour with George Strait again?

Caitlyn Smith: Yes, like can call me anytime. And, actually, good news. You know, we got to do a bunch of dates with him last year and it's a dream come true. and he's asked me to open for him again in Vegas this December, so we're doing a couple more shows and- I'm on cloud nine thinkin' about it. He's a legend. I also cannot help but just cry the entire time that he is on stage, (laughs) like ... Because those songs are, like, in my soul, in my blood, right, so George is the best. (laughs)

Sid Evans: Oh, that's great. well I want to ask you about your work with a group called Girls of Nashville-

Caitlyn Smith: Yes- yes.

Sid Evans: Which is all about trying to give women more visibility and more equity-

Caitlyn Smith: Yeah.

Sid Evans: ... in the music business. What are some things you've taken away from that experience?

Caitlyn Smith: Yeah, totally. Well, what an incredible honor to be a part of such a beautiful movement that really have, has happened in Nashville. You know, we started it, gosh, it was eight years ago. It's a show where we have about 12 to 15 girls play, and just share the stage with our friends. I mean, I was seeing there's just, there's an outrageous amount of talent in Nashville and not enough places for these women to be seen, and celebrated, and heard. And so, you know, we just created a seasonal show to just spotlight our favorite girls. And in the process, it really became this cherished night in Nashville, it sells out all the time. and it's really taught me the insane importance of community and especially as- as a woman in this business. There are a lot of dudes in the music business, it's not for the light of heart, the faint of heart, the music industry. And so to be able to have other women, to connect with, call up, to be able to bounce stuff off with, we really created this community that's just taught me, like, we need each other, and we need to support each other, so it's been a lotta- lotta fun. (laughs)

Sid Evans: Do you feel like Nashville is a more welcoming town for female artists than it was when you got there a decade or so ago?

Caitlyn Smith: Yes, I definitely have seen a shift and I'm so grateful for it. When I moved to town, and I started just writing songs, there were only two females on the radio. And so the message that was telling me is, like, "Oh, there's really not a space for you as an artist in this genre." And so, yeah, I feel grateful because as the years have gone by, women have just, like, really, they've just made their way. They've written all the songs on the radio, instead of been the artists on the radio, and then now there's just ... I have seen this insane wave of female talent that I am just in awe with and stoked on, 'cause I grew up on, like, women, country women of the 90s. But I'm just excited that it's actually happening, so thank God it's changed, it's changing. (laughs) We still have a ways to go, but it's changing. (laughs)

Sid Evans: Well, so you have now left Nashville and you and your family moved back to Minnesota. tell me about being back there and What's it been like to be reunited with your family and back in your home state?

Caitlyn Smith: Yeah, I mean, yeah, both my husband and I being from Minnesota, it's been a dream of ours to get back home and , just because we love it. We were finding that we would be out on the road, and we'd come back to Nashville, and there was still static, there was still noise. But when we would go back to Minnesota, that was able to, kind of, just shut off. And so it's been a really, like, wonderful, lovely season. it's been very, like, healing and honestly, like, when I moved to Nashville we didn't have kids and now I've got a- a five year old boy, a three year old boy, and- being able to raise them, like, with their grandparents, and their cousins really close, that's something that we- we really wanted. And so it's been really enriching and really nice to be close to family. But, honestly, we, we're back in Nashville, like, every month, so (laughs) we haven't really left and we- we- we never really will. We still love it here in Nashville and I think we'll always split time. But, it's fresh air for us there and in- in more ways than one.

Sid Evans: Well you got a lot of tour dates coming up. Are you excited to get back out on the road and be playing music in front of people?

Caitlyn Smith: Yes, it's the best, it's the best part of the job, Sid, getting out there and playing music for people. yeah, it's been an absolute treat to be out on the road. I just finished up my High & Low headline tour, and that was just the best time. and we're doing a bunch of festivals and all that good stuff this summer and- and it feels good, it's fun. And- and- and you can tell that people missed it. you know, the audiences are just out of their mind excited to be there and I think everybody just feels extra grateful after having not done it for so long to be back, it feels good. (laughs)

Sid Evans: Well, Caitlyn Smith, thank you so much for being on Biscuits and Jam.

Caitlyn Smith: Thank you, Sid, it was a pleasure, have an awesome day my dear.

Sid Evans: You too.

Voice over from Sid Evans: Thanks for listening to my conversation with Caitlyn Smith. You can check out her latest album, High, wherever you get your music. Make sure to visit CaitlynSmith.com for tour dates, social media and more. Southern Living is based in Birmingham, AL. Be sure to follow Biscuits & Jam on Apple Podcasts, Spotify or wherever you listen so you don't miss an episode. And we'd love your feedback. If you could rate this podcast and leave us a review we'd really appreciate it. You can also find us online at southernliving.com/biscuitsandjam Make sure to come back here next week for my conversation with Parker McCollum.