LADIES OF THE CANYON
THE MOVERS & SHAKERS OF SOCAL'S VIBRANT AMERICANA SCENE
By Nikki O'Neill

"This is our time... and we've got a goldmine." — Deb Morrison-Litchi, singer and bass player with Morrison & Company, freelance photographer, and owner of Pickly Pear Presents Americana Music Nights concert series.

Deb, what kind of work goes into creating Americana Music Nights and getting the word out every week? People might not realize all the time and money that goes into finding a venue, booking, scheduling, creating all the media, marketing, and doing publicity on a consistent basis — and feeding the social media animal on top of that, which is a job in itself. I had to get a creative team, with people I liked, that could help create what I needed: artwork, posters, and photographs. And I had to put money behind it to make it happen.

But you have to enjoy the process and do it for something much larger than money. The benefits of the whole event coming together is a wonderful ride, plus the people who have been brought together in the name of music.

The whole point of playing and listening to music is community... gathering to make something happen, and the love of the art.

While Deb strongly encourages anybody with a similar idea to “throw it against the wall, go for it and give it 200 percent,” she also points out that things will unfold and move according to some sort of timeline, but it’s usually not the one you had in mind.

It can take a long time for people to become aware of what you’re doing. You have to let it grow in the world. LA is such a vast, wide city with so much going on that it can be hard to know where to look. That’s why calling something “Americana Nights” or “California Country” is helpful because it lets people know that “oh, there’s something going on over there.” It gives people a place to look.

Deb’s publicity efforts — which include distinctive poster art and videos — drew the attention of Manda Mosher, a solo artist (formerly of CALECO the band) and owner of three entities: the all-genre record label Blackbird Record Label, California Country Apparel, and California Country Events.
FEATURES

Kim Grant and Pam Moore - Co-founders - photo by P. Jacobs

Manda, you were working on three California Country showcases at AMERICANAFEST 2019. What made you want to collaborate with Deb?

When I saw what Deb was doing at the Highland Park bowl with the images, artwork, and the cool, mysterious videos, I was really impressed. My husband and I are big fans and connoisseurs of album art and poster art. And I loved the combination of people that I know and that I never heard of that I got to discover through Deb's series. So as I was putting together the California Country events, I knew if we had Deb on the team, we could collectively present strong events. Partnering with Dave Bernell and his California Country radio show and Ted Russell Kamp were the perfect choices to represent our California scene. [Editor’s note: Dave did artist interviews and a live broadcast from the showcase, featuring Garrison Starr, Jamie Wyatt, Ted Russell Kamp, Tawny Ellis, Jim Lauderdale, and many more.]

How were you able to connect with AMERICANAFEST and make this one of their official events?

This goes back to CAUCO the band, where we were individual artists/songwriters who came together in a group. We often booked events with multiple artists because we enjoyed the community and tying them together. The California Country Showcase at AMERICANAFEST was a natural extension of these prior efforts. I always saw AMERICANAFEST as a smaller version of SXSW, which has these cool international and regional showcases like “Australia Fest.” Back when I started performing at AMERICANAFEST in 2010, they didn’t have such a thing at a California showcase.

In the initial years of the California themed events, we started out connecting with media outlets like The Alternate Root and other Californians who were out there doing smaller, boutique showcases, so we thought of pooling our resources. I reached out to Jed Hilly (Executive Director of the Americana Music Association) and asked if we could have an official status for our California event within the festival. They thought it was a great idea, and since that time, applying for an official event has become a streamlined application process that is open to anyone who has an event idea they would like to propose within the festival.

What does it take to promote this kind of showcase successfully?

It involves a lot of reaching out, a lot of communication, and you do have to spend money to promote it. You must learn social media marketing, advertise, and get good graphics done. Visuals are crucially important when it comes to marketing your event. With AMERICANAFEST, you can buy a sponsorship package, which is very helpful because you get into the festival app and on the program, so all the conference attendees know about your event.

In spite of how much Southern California has contributed to this style of music, its artists still deal with scene prejudice, right? California is often overlooked in the history of roots music. There’s a preconceived “not authentic” notion, but people don’t think of the rural areas that are here beyond the big cities.

One important thing to remember about LA’s contribution is that it had and still has some of the best recording studios in the world. Many of country music’s big artists historically came through LA to make records and perform in our historic venues.

Kina, how does the SoCal Americana scene get treated by the local press?

In LA, although there are great exceptions, Americana is sometimes ignored. It’s no secret that LA has some of the best recording studios in the world, and yet many of the great artists who have contributed to this genre are overlooked. Some of the best history of Americana is actually in LA, but that’s not always the case. Many of the artists have to go outside of LA to get the recognition they deserve.

Manda, in closing, how would you describe this community of artists that you’re a part of?

I see them as the storytellers of our time. Some of the next generation will look back at what we are doing now, and hopefully be inspired by watching our “old footage” or listening to “sleeve notes” of our music. We are creating something new, and we are the ones who are writing our own history. There is no one way to make music together, whether it’s in someone’s living room, curating an event, or recording an album. We are part of a larger story, and we are building something special.

SoCal Americana Artists to Check Out:

Manda Misher - Photo by Deb Bernell-Lettell

Dave Bernell: Leader of Just Dave Band and a central figure in the growing country scene in Long Beach, hosting The California Country Show, a radio show and podcast. He recently did a week-long series called “Trailblazers: Women in Country Music.”
where he interviewed female indie country artists from SoCal like Dixie Jade, Sherryee Gee, and Honey County.
california-country.com

Francescas Brown: Received great press for her latest single (including American Songwriter) and will perform throughout 2020.
francescabrownmusic.com

Annette Conlon: Releasing a new album this spring.
annetteconlon.com

Lacey Cowden: Host of the “Live from Venice” showcases at The Townhouse, poster artist, and illustrator.
laceycowden.com

Tawnya Ellis: Releasing a new album, “Love Life,” with U.K. tour this spring. tawnyalife.com

Molly Hanner: & the Midnight Tokers: Recording their second album with producer Shon G伙伴: (Rickie Lee Jones, Ben Harper) and touring later in 2020. mollyhanner.com

KP Hawthorn: Six months into touring the U.S. with her husband Johnny Hawthorn in their duo, The Hawthorne, and promoting their album “Morning Sun,” East Coast tour in February and SXSW in March. KP is also producing records with production partner Steve Borno; they just completed an EP for Saint John’s Dance, a bluegrass-Americana band.

Adrienne Isom: Bass player with her and her husband Chris Isom’s band Noxena. New album out late spring.

KP and Adrienne are also teamed up for a film project focusing on the legendary Palomino Club in North Hollywood (1949-1995), which was a home base to many country superstars: Ronnie Mack’s Barn Dance; Talent Night; and other iconic happenings through the decades.

P.J. Jacobs: New single and video “Rainbow” followed by a new album, “Two Truths and a Lie,” in February. SXSW in March, and extensive touring in 2020 including (West Coast Feb/March, East Coast, and Southeast; April/May, and Europe Oct). pjJacobs.com

Heather Lomas: Single and video release in February, full-length album out in mid-April. heatherlomasmusic.com


Manda Mosher: Solo artist, Owner of three titles: Blackbird Record Label, California Country Events (which hosted three events at AMERICANAfest 2019), and California Country Apparel. Built San Fernando Valley Recording, a recording and rehearsal facility, recording singles and a full-length album. Released Ian Gauthier’s album on Blackbird. Listening to label submissions. Doing shows, including The Troubadour, in March mandamosher.com


Amelia K Spicer: Had an official showcase at AMERICANAfest 2019 and is always touring across the U.S. ameliacspice.com

Garrison Starr: European tour in Jan/Feb. New album out this year. garrisonstarr.com

Jaime Wyatt: jamiewyatt.com


Get Your SoCal Americana, Alt-Country, and Country Fix at These Venues

Grand Ole Echo: McCabe’s Guitar Shop; the Cinema Bar (once a hub for the whole scene originating in the ‘90s, and where Lucinda Williams got her start); The Townhouse; Coffee Gallery Backstage; Hotel Cafe: Wine & Song; Ireland’s 32; Maui Sugar Mill Saloon (“Twang City” show series; Pete Anderson’s The Viva Altar Jam at Viva Rancho Cucamonga, Harvest’s Tuning Fork; Love Song Bar; Lucky Strike Live; the Park Bar & Grill; Joe’s Great American Bar & Grill; Petes Place; Cowboy Palace Saloon in Chatsworth; Copper Blues in Oxnard; Cowboy Country in Long Beach; Papas & Harriet’s out in Joshua Tree; El Segundo Public Library’s concert series; Prickly Pear Presents “Americana Music Nights,” and “California Country” events. ——

Photos: Deb Morrison-Littell/Shots by Morrison

Prickly Pear Presents Americana Music Nights. Photo Art: Lacy Flies

SoCal Americana musicians going to AmericanaFest — photo by Kariann Knudson