

April Verch Shares Her Bright Ideas

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[April Verch](#) can't stand still. When she's playing fiddle onstage, the energetic Canadian tends to shuffle her feet, swing her hips or rock on her heels. Occasionally she even takes off step dancing, her feet pounding out a sophisticated rhythm against her spry bow work.

"It's harder for me to stand still than it is for me to move while I'm playing," says the energetic Ontario native. "When I was a kid learning to play, my teachers used to tell me to tone it down. It was affecting my playing."

More than simply affecting her fiddling, that impulse to move with the music has defined Verch's style as nimble, excitable and intuitively graceful.

"It's a strong part of my history," she explains, "and a big part of the tradition in the Ottawa Valley, where I grew up."

Over two decades in the music business — she released her debut as a teenager — Verch has developed a reputation as a sharp student of American and Canadian folk traditions. *Bright Like Gold*, her latest album with the April Verch Band, reveals a range that extends from the Ottawa Valley deep into the hollers of Appalachia. Backed by bass and banjo player Cody Walters and

guitarist Hayes Griffin, she launches into rags and reels, ballads and medleys, old favorites and new compositions from both sides of the border.

As she and her band made their way through the Rockies to Nashville, Verch spoke to CMT Edge about playing songs from her childhood, covering her heroes' music and navigating the tricky boundaries between tradition and innovation.

CMT Edge: Your last album was a collection of Southern fiddle tunes. Did you have a similar theme in mind for *Bright Like Gold*?

Verch: I don't think we really looked at it in that way. We just decided to just play the music that we really love right now. Southern Appalachian fiddle tunes make up a big part of that, but we also have stuff on there that's more old-time — some Western swing and some country classics. All of that stuff fits together naturally because the roots are similar, at least when you trace it back far enough. It's nice to reach a point in my career when we can play what we love. For the first number of years when you're touring, you don't want to alienate any of your fans who have supported you. But I feel like we're at a point now when things are going well and people appreciate us for our band sound. If we put our stamp on it, it's probably going to work OK for everybody.

There seem to be a lot of songs on here that you learned as a child and have lived with almost all of your life. It seems almost autobiographical that way.

I'm glad to hear that, actually. The record should be a snapshot of my life right now, not just my musical passions but also where I'm at as a person. My dad loved old country music, so I grew up listening to him play those kinds of records around the house. The [Loretta Lynn](#) and [Flatt & Scruggs](#) songs are definitely ones I remember from being a kid.

The cover of Loretta Lynn's "Don't Come Home a Drinkin'" really stands out. Why did you decide to record that song?

I wanted to do one of hers because she's somebody who had really influenced me in the last couple of years, especially her songwriting. I wanted to do something that hadn't been totally overdone, and I also didn't want another slow country song. It came down to a few that we had in mind. We played through them and tried to figure out which fit the record the best.

There are some strong medleys on *Bright Like Gold*. Can you talk about the process of putting those together?

The whole tradition of playing medleys is very much from my Canadian upbringing. When you play for square dances, you might play for 20 minutes, and you don't want to be playing the same tune the whole time. Putting them together is very tricky, though. We had a super-long list of tunes we wanted to record, so that was one way to help decide what to include. ... It's basically trial and error. We did a lot more arranging for this record as a band. The three of us sat down and worked on "Davy Davy" and "Folding Down the Sheets." We've become attached to those arrangements.

How did you get [Mac Wiseman](#) on the album?

We just asked him. I wrote that song after listening to him one day while I was out on a jog. I could just hear him singing it. So we asked, and he said yes. He had a lot of fond memories of touring in Canada and hearing a lot of Canadian fiddlers, so when we told him where I came from, I think his ears perked up. So we recorded him in his living room. He's 87 now, and it's hard for him to get out. It's easier to go to him and have him be really comfortable. But he's totally on his game.

As someone who has studied these traditions so closely, how do you balance being respectful to the past and doing something new and personal?

I used to worry about it more when I was starting out, especially when I was playing American tunes. I didn't want to seem like I was pretending to be something that I was not. Now that I'm more comfortable with everything, the key is just not worrying about it at all. It's a matter of giving yourself permission to play what you like. We're lucky because as a band, when we play music together, it ends up sounding like us. That keeps it fresh. But it's important to do it in a way that is respectful to these traditions. Sometimes you just can't improve on that stuff. It's just so good.