

Short Bio

Virginia native Janie Barnett cut her teeth on bluegrass festivals, church coffeehouses, and the American Folklife Festival. These early roots influences, along with the music of her household growing up – Billie Holiday, Mozart, Broadway musicals – informs her Brooklyn-based Americana.

Janie has worn many hats in her career: An artist, whose 2017 album release “You See This River” was a first round Grammy nominee and named one of the year’s best on several Roots/Americana lists; a backup singer both live and on recording for the likes of Linda Ronstadt, Rickie Lee Jones, Bonnie Raitt, and Celine Dion; the voice of Chevrolet, Campbell’s Soup, Sprite, and countless other national commercials; an award-winning producer/arranger for other artists.

Janie performs solo, as well as with various incarnations of her group known as BlueRoom. The group is currently at work on two collections: a new album of originals, and an album drawing from the Cole Porter catalogue, laced with Americana instrumentation.

Janie continues to freelance, and commutes to Boston, Massachusetts, where she is on the faculty of Berklee College of Music, mentoring emerging singer-songwriters.

Long Bio

Virginia native Janie Barnett cut her teeth on bluegrass festivals, church coffeehouses, and the American Folklife Festival. When she met iconic Americana barnstormer and Newgrass pioneer John Hartford at Folklife, so began her love affair with the alternative roots movement.

“I couldn’t commit to being a 100mph flatpicker. But I fell in love with those sounds. And behind every great song was a renegade twist. That twist is really part of my musical DNA.”

The seeds were planted for a lifelong quest for a hybrid style that favored the roots music instrumentation, the whimsical story-telling of Steinbeck, and the social passions of one who grew up in the backyard of Washington D.C. Her parents exposed her to many kinds of music: Billie Holiday, Mozart, theater.

“One day my dad came home with three LPs: The Weavers “Live at Carnegie Hall,” the cast album to “My Fair Lady,” and Danny Kaye’s “Mommy Gimme A Drink of Water.” Try merging those three titles!”

One can see the roots of this renegade impulse throughout Barnett’s growing up. Socialist grandparents, a newsman father and a labor advocate mother. Barnett defected from the local high school for boarding school, where, ironically, she found a like-

minded tribe of musicians. After a year in the Ivy League, she defected again to play in the folk clubs as a solo performer and in a roots and reggae band, in New England and Cambridge; then, ultimately defecting again to New York City.

“New York was a mecca for me, as it is for so many. I knew the early folk scene had dissipated, but I figured there was something there that would drive me towards the music and the tribe I was searching for.”

And then another unlikely turn. Barnett rose in the freelance world, making a name for herself as a smart, precise, and professional chameleon musician, singing on countless film, tv, and commercial projects, as well as singing backup for iconic stars like Linda Ronstadt, Celine Dion, and Rickie Lee Jones. Appearances on SNL and the Today Show, membership in an elite session musician supergroup – these were the bookings of the time.

“Success in that world has been very important to me, because I value craft so much. It was gratifying to have my craft validated. I was asked to sing every style convincingly – pop, blues, rock, jazz; to sound like Linda, or Lucinda, or Bonnie, singers I admired and/or had sung for. It was a satisfying challenge. It also came at a time when I had to say no to touring, because I was raising my daughter. Disappearing for weeks at a time was not an option I was willing to take.”

Barnett rose to become one of the top 20 session singers, while continuing her search for her own essential expression as a writer/artist. The essential songs, timbre, the core family of musicians.

“I was going through some discoveries on a personal level, and I recognized I had to own that process as an artist as well.”

Several collections of music were released through those years, but none Barnett felt had fully captured her authentic voice.

“You See This River,” Janie Barnett & BlueRoom’s 2017 release, was the culmination of Barnett’s years of exploration, and living a life that many of us find ourselves living.

“By trial and error we find ourselves, we retrieve ourselves from our own fires and folly. With any luck we find our authentic selves and, importantly, stop looking over our shoulders. The renegade is part of my DNA in a good way, but it also played a role in my running from myself. This record, these songs, reflect a period where I stopped running. So the stories reflect the process, and the sound reflects the result. It took that universally documented ten-year cycle for me to return to the sounds of my early days of exposure to folk and bluegrass. I have a happy home now, merging the sounds of my different influences.”

In addition to working on a second BlueRoom album of original songs, Janie is arranging and recording an album of songs from the Cole Porter catalogue, laced with

instrumentation from her Americana sound. This is another return to her early influences and a distinct labor of love.

In between her artist life of writing, recording and performance, Janie travels from her home base of Brooklyn to Boston to mentor emerging singer-songwriters at Berklee College of Music.