

Carlene Carter – Bio

Rebecca Carlene Smith aka Carlene Carter was born on 26th September 1955 in Madison, Tennessee and is the daughter of the late June Carter [d. 2003] and country singer Carl Smith. Married at the age of sixteen the first union, to Joseph Simpkins Jr., barely lasted a couple of years and produced a daughter, Tiffany Anastasia, following which Carlene married songwriter Jack Wesley Routh a songwriter for the House of Cash and the couple had a son, John Jackson. Credited to Susanna Clark [Guy Clark's wife] and Carlene Routh, "Easy From Now On" opened the Emmylou Harris album "**Quarter Moon In A Ten Cent Sky**" [1978]. The album cover featured a painting by Susanna.

Aged twenty-three and signed by Warner Brothers as a solo artist, Carlene travelled to England to record her self-titled debut album with Graham Parker's band, The Rumour. The album, produced by band members Bob Andrews and Brinsley Schwarz [and co-produced by Martyn Smith] was recorded at Eden Studios in London. The ten-song disc featured four Carter originals, one written with the late Rosie Nix [d. 2003] her half-sister, plus covers of songs penned by Parker, Rodney Crowell, Tracy Nelson and a pair from Alex Call [Clover]. When released the album was received rapturously by press and fans alike, and to maintain the momentum her sophomore disc "**Two Sides To Every Woman**" appeared the following year. Recorded at New York's Power Station and produced by Lance Quinn and Tony Bongiovi, the collection opened with "Do It In A Heartbeat" a tune penned by guitarist John McFee [Clover, Elvis Costello, Doobie Brothers], Carlene and her third husband, Nick Lowe [+]. "**Two Sides To Every Woman**" featured nine songs, six of which were written by Carter, including a collaboration with label-mate Karen Brooks. Released as a single "Do It In A Heartbeat" peaked at # 42 on the Billboard Country Chart in late 1979.

Once again prominently featuring material penned by Carter, "**Musical Shapes**" and "**Blue Nun**" were recorded in England, produced by Lowe and released by Jake Riviera's F Beat Records. Featuring a support vocal from Dave Edmunds, when Carlene released Richard Dobson's "Baby Ride Easy" on a single it peaked at # 79 on the Country Chart, and was her last chart entry for almost a decade. Two versions of "**Blue Nun**" featuring different tracks were released on vinyl. Produced by Roger Bechirian and recorded at Ampro Studios in London and the legendary Rockfield Studio in Wales, "**C'est C Bon**" was a CBS/Epic Records release. In 1983, Carlene scored a # 32 American Pop single chart when she joined Robert Ellis Orrall on "I Couldn' Say No," a track from his album "**Special Pain.**" Carter subsequently performed, for a year, in the London stage production of "**Pump Boys And Dinettes,**" and for a couple of years joined her mother and aunt's in reforming The Carter Family. Produced by Jim Rooney, their 1988 Mercury/PolyGram release "**Wildwood Flower**" mostly featured interpretations of old Carter Family favourites.

Carlene shared the vocals with [sometime writing collaborator] John McFee on "Time's Up" a 1990 # 26 Country hit for the guitarist's latest band Southern Pacific. Following a seven-year solo recording hiatus, Carter signed with Warner/Reprise and her comeback album "**I Fell In Love**" was produced by the late Howie Epstein [d. 2003]. Epstein was a member of Tom Petty's Heartbreakers [1982 - 2002]. Co-written by Carter, Epstein, Benmont Tench and Perry Lamek the album title song gave her a # 3 Country hit single in mid 1990, and her "Come On Back" peaked at the same position a few months later. Carter earned a Best Country Vocal Performance by a Female Grammy nomination for "I Fell In Love." Subsequent singles "The Sweetest Thing" and "One Love" peaked respectively at # 25 and 33. Signed by VH-1 Carlene hosted the daily country music video programme "**The Carlene Carter Show.**"

Despite the commercial success enjoyed by "**I Fell In Love**" when Carter took a year off to write new material Reprise released her from her contract, and she went on to sign with the new Warner subsidiary Giant Records. Produced by Epstein, "**Little Love Letters**" included the # 3 Country single "Every Little Thing" but Carter's subsequent single releases from that album and the follow-up "**Little Acts Of Treason,**" which she self-produced, uniformly failed to crack the Top 40. Carlene made a brief appearance in the movie "**Maverick**" [1994] and "Something Already Gone" which she performed on the soundtrack was released as a single. Giant released the compilation "**Hindsight 20/20**" [1996] featuring twenty songs spanning two decades of Carter's recording career.

Carlene reunited with Dave Edmunds for a Nike commercial in 2002, and the following year performed her "Bandit Of Love" on The Chieftains "**Further Down The Old Plank Road**" and covered "I've Always Been Crazy" on "**Lonesome, On'ry And Mean, A Tribute To Waylon Jennings.**" That year her

mother, step-father and long-time partner Epstein passed. Returning to Nashville, circa 2005, Carlene starred as her mother in the stage musical **“Wildwood Flowers: The June Carter Story.”** In 2006 Carlene married singer and actor Joseph Breen. **“Stronger,”** recorded at Cash Cabin Studio and produced by her step-brother John Carter Cash, was initially sold via her web site and at concerts. Old friend John McFee was responsible for subsequent production work on **“Stronger”** and Yep Roc released that version in early March 2008.

Note.

[+] - Lowe’s recording career began with Kippington Lodge, a band helmed by Brinsley Schwarz. Married during 1979, Carter and Lowe were divorced in 1990.

Discography :

Solo - **“Carlene Carter”** [1978] ; **“Two Sides To Every Woman”** [1979] ; **“Musical Shapes”** [1980] ; **“Blue Nun”** [1981] ; **“C’est C Bon”** [1983] ; **“I Fell In Love”** [1990] ; **“Little Love Letters”** [1993] ; **“Little Acts Of Treason”** [1995] ; **“Stronger”** [2008] :
with The Carter Family – **“Wildwood Flower”** [1988] :

Arthur Wood

Kerrville Kronikles 01/08 & 02/08.

[925 words]