

## Sylvia

Award-winning, chart-topping country artist **Sylvia**'s ambitious new album, ***Nature Child – A Dreamer's Journey***, is a project that she literally has spent her entire life making. ***Nature Child*** represents “a full circle moment for me,” the Nashville-based singer/songwriter shares. Playful as well as thought-provoking, this generation-spanning concept album (due out February 22 on her own Red Pony Records) will inspire listeners of all ages to follow their dreams.

***Nature Child*** is filled with a dozen enchanting story-songs. Tracks like the richly atmospheric “Avalon,” the lilting “Dancing Over An Emerald Isle,” and the joyous “If I Only Had Wings” convey three main album themes: “don’t be afraid to dream,” “imagination sets you free,” and “you are loved for who you are.” On stellar songs such as the title track and “My Best Friend,” Sylvia touches upon other themes that address the importance of remembering our innate connection with the earth and the qualities of being a true friend.

***Nature Child***'s songwriting and arrangements reveal Sylvia's deepening as a vocalist and storyteller. She has long moved beyond the bubbly country pop of her signature hits to create a broader, more sophisticated music that still retains the relatability that helped to make her early songs so popular. A key reason why ***Nature Child*** is so easy on the ears is Sylvia's gentle, gorgeous singing, not just on her lead vocals but also with her ethereal backing vocals that lend an other-worldly feel to many of the tracks.

Working with her longtime co-producer/collaborator John Mock (Dixie Chicks, James Taylor, Dolly Parton), Sylvia blended rootsy country touches with elements of Celtic folk music (from traditional to modern artists like Enya), timeless lullabies, and film soundtracks like *The Lord of the Rings*. American Songbook standards were another touchstone, with Harry Nilsson's *A Little Touch of Schmilsson In The Night* being a particular influence. Sylvia loved how Nilsson's performance was earnest yet playful, and how well arranged the songs were – all qualities that imbue ***Nature Child***'s own smartly executed arrangements.

Sylvia had long associations with many of her collaborators. Mock has co-produced her albums since 1996 and Sylvia is a big admirer of his talents as a producer, musician, composer and arranger. Matt McGee, who played electric bass on ***Nature Child***, first worked with Sylvia in 1983, and she and John knew the string, horn, and woodwind players from the Nashville music scene. This familiarity greatly aided the recording process. “There was an intimacy,” Sylvia revealed. “They were all part of our musical family.”

***Nature Child***'s message of pursuing your dreams is one Sylvia has experienced first-hand and successfully. “I write about dreaming with a lot of authority,” she says. When Sylvia was three years old, she had an epiphany while singing one Sunday in church. “I heard a voice inside me say: ‘This is what you do.’” That same year, while watching American Bandstand, Sylvia had a similar revelation that she knew she'd appear on that show one day. And she did. In 1982 she performed her hit crossover single, “Nobody,” on the show. Sylvia stresses that you must put in the work to make dreams come true. Growing up in Kokomo, Indiana, she would practice in front of a mirror day after day, year after year, imagining that she was singing in front of thousands of people.

After graduating from high school, Sylvia headed to Nashville. She arrived in Music City with a plan: get a day job in the music industry; learn about the music business, and work on getting a recording contract. Sylvia got a job at Pi-Gem Music, which was then one of Nashville's hottest publishing companies. Pi-Gem was run by Tom Collins (who produced acts like Barbara Mandrell and Ronnie Milsap) and featured a stable of top songwriters, including Dean Dillon and the Grammy-nominated duo Kye Fleming & Dennis Morgan. She spent 4 ½ years at Pi-Gem Music – answering phones, running errands, making coffee, singing song demos, and hanging out with those people every day. “What a magical thing that I happened to get a job working there!” Sylvia states.

After hearing Sylvia sing at an audition, RCA offered her a recording deal. Sylvia's first two singles snuck into Billboard's Country Top 40; however, in those days, your label would likely drop you if one of your first three singles didn't crack the Top 10. Fortunately, her third single, "Tumbleweed," reached #10 and her fourth, "Drifter," went all the way to #1. Sylvia's successful singles led to her debut album, *Drifter*, which peaked at #10 on Billboard's Country charts in 1981. Her follow-up, the *Just Sylvia* album, reached #2, and contained her chart-topping, two-million-selling crossover hit, "Nobody." The song was BMI's Country Song of the Year for most radio airplay in 1982 and helped Sylvia be named Academy of Country Music's "Female Vocalist of the Year" and Billboard's #1 Country Artist, as well as earning a Grammy nomination for "Best Female Vocalist." Sylvia released three more albums on RCA, which yielded a half dozen Top 10 Country singles.

Her years working at Pi-Gem served Sylvia well during her recording career. Tom Collins, a multi-CMA winning producer, helmed Sylvia's first four RCA albums. While at Pi-Gem, she also became friends with many songwriters there, and they wrote songs with her in mind. "They knew me. They knew my voice," she shares. "I had a team of people who wanted to see me make it and have success."

During her RCA years, Sylvia noticed that many of fans were kids, which she appreciated and welcomed. She enjoyed signing autographs and talking with them after her shows. Sylvia feels children not only liked her fun, bouncy music but also that she didn't talk down to them. "I have a very active inner child and I think kids are very attracted to that." One can only guess that it was a mixture of the sweetness and sincerity she saw in people like Mister Rogers and one of her personal idols, Red Skelton, that nurtured those qualities in Sylvia herself.

This affection for her young fans spurred Sylvia's dream to make an album appropriate for both kids and adults. She first attempted the project in the late '80s-early '90s following her RCA years, but no record was done. "It just didn't want to come together then," she says. "But the idea to create this album just wouldn't let me go!" Six of the songs she co-wrote with Verlon Thompson (Guy Clark, Trisha Yearwood) between 1988 and 1990. The other six songs were written more recently.

In her post-RCA years, Sylvia released albums on her own Red Pony Records. Her first effort, *The Real Story*, arrived in 1996, followed by a Christmas album, *A Cradle in Bethlehem*. On the mainly acoustic *Where In The World*, she covered some of her favorite songs, like Leonard Cohen's "Bird On A Wire" and Joni Mitchell's "Marcie." In 2016, Sylvia released *It's All In The Family*, which she describes as her most personal album, and she re-conceived her old hits on 2018's *Second Bloom*.

Sylvia also worked on becoming a better singer during this time period. "People think the gift is that you are able to sing," she explains. "But for me, the true gift is the deep desire to want to communicate through music, and that's something that needs to be honed and practiced." For over 30 years, she studied weekly with noted voice teacher, Gerald Arthur. "He not only taught me about voice but about life itself." From him, she learned the importance of understanding a song's story and how to get inside the song without letting the sound of her voice overshadow the story. The art of communication is a skill Sylvia utilizes as a certified life and career coach, which she became in the early '00s. Her coaching often involves helping people connect with their gifts so they can manifest their dreams more fully. This work parallels what she is doing on ***Nature Child*** and Sylvia hopes that adults listening to these songs will be inspired to think: "maybe I'll dust off that old dream of mine and see what wants to happen!"

Although it has taken more than 30 years, Sylvia is thrilled to bring this dream project to life. But she still has more dreams for ***Nature Child***, which she calls "the most important work I've ever done." To make an album that is about helping other people, rather than promoting herself, was a liberating experience for Sylvia. "I hope it will connect with people in a heartfelt way," she states. "If you're open to it, this music can inspire you to dream and go for it. It can be a soundtrack for your own dreamer's journey."