

MUSIC: Folk singer-songwriter Connie Dover grew up with old-time songs and ballads

by Sean Clancy

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Jonesboro native and Emmy winning singer-songwriter Connie Dover plans to pay homage to her Natural State roots during her Little Rock Folk Club performance Saturday at Little Rock's Hibernia Irish Tavern.

Growing up, Dover would listen to her grandmother, Lillian Dover, who lived near West Ridge, sing pieces of songs like "Barbara Allen," a Scottish ballad that dates to the 1600s. She would hear her father sing "Jack of Diamonds" (or "Rye Whiskey"), which he learned from her grandmother.

I would go visit in the summer and she would sing snippets of these old songs and ballads," she says from her home in Missouri. "That planted the seeds very early in my brain that there was an alternative to the music that was being presented to me in popular media.

"When I can sing a song that I learned from my grandmother in the state where I was born and where she lived and worked, that means a lot to me. I feel like the circle is completed."

Dover and her family moved from Arkansas and eventually settled in Kansas City, Mo. She left college to tour with a country band and later earned a degree in history from William Jewell College in Liberty, Mo., according to the Encyclopedia of Arkansas. She also studied at Oxford University in England.

After returning to Missouri she joined Celtic folk group Scartaglen, with which she recorded three albums: "Scartaglen" from 1984, "The Middle Path" from 1986 and 1992's "Last Night's Fun."

She recorded her 1991 debut solo album, "Somebody," in Scotland. Also, in 1991 Dover began a side hustle as a cook and guide at a Wyoming ranch.

"I just found that I really enjoy playing music and doing camp and ranch cooking, so I've tried to keep both of those as a presence in my life," she explains.

(A foodie aside: Dover likes making Mexican fare; among her favorites, she says, are chicken and green chile enchiladas and green chile pozole).

She subsequently recorded five solo albums: "The Wishing Well" (1994), "If I Ever Return" (1997), "The Border of Heaven" (2000), "The Holly and the Ivy" (2008) and "Restless Angel," which came out in 2016.

The Boston Globe called her "the finest folk ballad singer America has produced since Joan Baez."

She has also made music for film, including director Ang Lee's "Ride with the Devil." She won an Emmy for best musical composition and arrangement for her work on the 2007 Kansas City PBS documentary "Bad Blood: The Border War that Triggered the Civil War."

She says she really enjoyed writing for movies. "When I sing or choose a song that I like, typically there's a picture in my head, like a landscape, or maybe there's people moving in a landscape. It made a lot of sense to me to be presented with a film and then be asked to come up with music that would work with the mood of the film. It can be a very powerful combination."

Nature is a frequent theme in her songs, and Dover has been making videos singing in the wilderness and sharing them on her YouTube channel. It's something she began doing during the pandemic.

"It's a wonderful way to connect with listeners," she notes, "and it worked for me when I wasn't able to book concerts or be on the road." Find links to her videos at conniedover.net.

In addition to being sidelined by the pandemic, Dover put touring on hold for the past few years as she cared for her father, who had suffered a massive stroke.

"I don't regret a minute of it," she says. "He continued to inspire me until he died in 2024."

A fall off a horse resulted in some broken ribs, which also kept her from singing and performing.

After a full recovery, she's ready to get back into the musical saddle. Saturday's folk club show is a one-off, but Dover says she's looking forward to new projects and performing.

"What I realized is that I'm not finished with this," she says. "I'm raring to go. I want to sing and I'm writing music for a new record."

Connie Dover

7:30 p.m. Saturday, Hibernia Irish Tavern, 9700 N. Rodney Parham Road, Little Rock, for the Little Rock Folk Club

Admission: \$20, \$15 military, \$10 students, free for children 12 and younger

littlerockfolkclub.org