

# Dave's Record Reviews

#4

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## REMEMBERING NANCI GRIFFITH

Americana music has lost another giant with the passing of Nanci Griffith. She died on August 13, at age 68.

It was a Saturday morning in 1994 when I walked into my favorite record store and noticed the music that the owner – a friend of mine – was playing on the store's modest stereo. "It's a new album by Nanci Griffith," he replied to my inquiry. "It's really good – I like her music a lot." I hadn't heard of her, but the songs seemed strong. I went home with the album.

The album was **Flyer**, Nanci's 10th, so I was late in coming to an appreciation of her music. That first time I heard her I wasn't so sure about her distinctive voice, and I imagine that voice may have deterred a few others from giving her music a serious chance. But after a brief time of actually *listening* she became my *favorite* female artist. I have all of her albums, and feel blessed to have seen her live in concert four times.

She was born and grew up in Texas, where she developed her musical roots and was a fixture in the music scenes of Houston and Austin in the '70's and '80's. She moved to Nashville in 1986, and was a friend to and influence on many other aspiring and established music stars. When she started recording in the late 1970's her record company first tried to promote her as a country artist, but her music spanned and transcended many genres for such a simple classification. If a label is necessary, I think that only 'Americana' would encompass the extent of her work. She released 18 studio albums and 2 live ones over the course of her career. Her 1994 album, **Other Voices, Other Rooms**, on which several other music luminaries joined her, won a Grammy for 'Best Contemporary Folk Album.' Other artists had great success recording her songs, but though she was one of the most loved and respected singer-songwriters of her generation she never attained super-star status.

Her first eight albums were released on vinyl. Of those, recommending a 'best' is just not possible. But her 4th, **Last of the True Believers** (Philo-Rounder, 1986) is great, and where she really hit her stride as an artist. Her 6th, **Little Love Affairs** (MCA, 1988) is my favorite of her vinyl releases.

But there are two CDs that I consider essential and often recommend to friends. **The Complete MCA Studio Recordings** (2003) is a 2 CD release that collects four studio albums she recorded for that label, remastered with sound that is – dare I say it? – as good as if not better than the vinyl albums. The other is **Dustbowl Symphony** (1999), recorded with the London Symphony Orchestra. With the orchestration, it is not a 'typical' Griffith album, but it is a great one. I live in hope that it will one day be released on vinyl. Her songs, from previous albums, are given a new and different life here. "It's a Hard Life" on this album is a cut I often use during stereo demos.

Nanci experienced a number of health issues during her life, including two battles with cancer, and did not tour the last few years. At the time of this writing the cause of her death has only been said to be "natural causes." She is gone, but she leaves a rich musical legacy. RIP Nanci. You are missed, and will be remembered.