

Arts & Life

Keepin' on the road

by Zack Harding
Arts & Life Editor

Shannon Whitworth is a local musician who plays music in the genres of country, Americana, and bluegrass. Last summer she released her debut album *No Expectations*.

Shannon started her professional music career with the progressive bluegrass group The Biscuit Burners which formed in 2004. With that group she toured the country refining her musical abilities and crafting her songwriting. She played claw-hammer banjo and sung for the group, lending her own blues-influences the their sound.

With the release of *No Expectations* she has taken a strong step out into her solo musical career. With songs like "Here but Never Home" and the title track, she is proving that she has a whole lot to say. The interview that follows sheds a little bit of insight

into where she came from, and where she hopes to go.

How did you get started into the world of music, and what role has Brevard/Western North Carolina played for you?

I grew up with parents that play music and brothers that play music. When I moved here I knew a few chords on guitar. I picked a little bit on my brother's banjo and wanted to be a mandolin player. Laura, who runs 336 [a clothing and novelties shop in Brevard] overheard me plunking on a banjo at a party and asked me if I owned a banjo. I told her "no, but I've always wanted one." I was at Brevard College at the time and I was riding my

bike home from school. I got to my house and there was a banjo leaning up on my doorstep. I didn't even know her that well. I had just moved to town, and I was like "Oh my gosh." She said "I rented this



for you from Celestial Mountain Music." So I was forming a relationship right away with Celestial, and I met pickers.

What were you pursuing in school before you got on this track of music?

Outdoor education and art. I didn't end up graduating. I dropped out to get a degree in music touring (laughs). It was an interesting experience.

Was there a certain point where you realized that you could pursue music in a professional manner, or was it more of a gradual shift?

I never considered doing it. I wanted to, but I was too scared to even think about it too much.

It wasn't until I met the Biscuit Burners, my band mates. Studying outdoor ed. obviously, you like to be outdoors and you like to be a minimalist and live out of a tent. So, it really wasn't a whole [lot]

lots of real tours and festivals. It got pretty cool after that, but it was always cool. It was a challenge, and we all had to live very frugally. When you start a band, it's rough.

I was roofing, working for a tile-roofer, and still coming back and working at Duckpond Pottery, sort of patching together ways of income to make it work. Then I didn't need to after a while and that's how it has been ever since.

Embracing your own solo career has to be a pretty different experience than what you did with the Biscuit Burners.

It's weird. It's totally weird, and something I never thought I would do: having my name on a cd. If someone told me that I was going to do this two years ago, I would have laughed. Not being in the band anymore, I had all of this downtime, and I was writing incessantly.

Do you just let the songs come as they may or do you ever set out saying "this is going to be a certain type of song?"

If I did that, I probably wouldn't write. I think it just has to come out. You just have to let it flow, which could probably drive some people crazy if they want this or that. Music is just like using different colors. When you paint you want to be more intense with certain colors.

Is there anything you would like to say about the term "success" and what that means to you as a musician?

I think if you can meet your needs, be really happy, and keep the creative juices flowing through all of that, then that is success.