



Famous musicians helped Collins on latest project

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By Denis House

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Though he now lives thousands of miles away, Bardstown and Nelson County still hold a special place in Dean Collins' heart.



Dean M. Collins

While most people fondly recall their childhood through old photos or tales around the dinner table, Collins is in the unique position of being able to convey his memories through his music, with his latest album and especially in the title track, “Land Where the Wishes Come True.”

“That one is about growing up in Bardstown,” Collins said from his home in California. The song is flavored with the spices of growing up in rural America, and it is a nostalgic trip down the old dirt roads and Collins’ dream of bigger things and flying, but never forgetting his roots. His music has been described as “Americana-tinged Power Pop that already sounds like a modern classic.”

“The song is kind of a love letter to my father and to that time growing up,” Collins said. “The land where the wishes come true is about the small farmer who wants to put food on the table, and you know, just give his family a better life. And I just love that idea. And so I think that’s a very powerful connection with the town.”

Collins came to Bardstown in the late 1960s when he was a couple of years old as his father worked for Ralston Purina. After living in downtown briefly, the family moved out to a farm in Cox’s Creek, which Collins described as “kind of idyllic.”

After attending St. Joseph for a couple of years, the family moved to Indiana, as his father was transferred a lot with his job. When he was in fourth grade, his parents divorced and he moved back to Bardstown, where he attended Bardstown Elementary, Middle and High School.

Performing started at young age

His love for music started at an early age, playing a drum in a performance at St. Joseph Cathedral when he was in the first grade. And he was hooked.

“Everyone was watching me and said ‘Oh wow, that was really great,’ ” Collins said. “And I felt like I really connected with the audience. And I guess that’s probably where it started.”

In high school he also participated in choir, as he loved to sing. He would also play guitar in church every once in a while.

“I always carried that silly guitar around with me,” Collins said. “Everywhere. I don’t know why, but I did.” One time having that guitar almost led to a performance with Jimmy Buffett.

“I was maybe 11 at the time,” Collins said, remembering a trip he took with his mom, stepfather and brother in a Volkswagen Rabbit to Colorado, where they happened upon a benefit concert featuring

where they happened upon a benefit concert featuring Buffett and John Denver.

“They were just standing there,” Collins said of the legendary musicians. “I said to Buffett that I have my guitar and we could jam. Now he’s about to perform in front of thousands of people and he’s drinking a Coors Light so I run to get my guitar. The car was far away and by the time I got back he’s on stage so we did not get to jam. But the point is, in that tiny little car, I have my guitar as we crossed the country.”

Love of flying and music

As a child, Collins was always surrounded by planes. His grandfather worked for McDonnell Douglas and worked on the F4 Phantom and other iconic airplanes. Collins said from an early age his was smitten with the bug to fly and always knew that’s what he wanted to do. He continues to do that today as a pilot for Delta Airlines.

But his love of music always had a strong pull on him. He released his first album as a senior at Northwestern, called “Lost in the Big Picture,” about being at the precipice of school and the real world, which he said seemed kind of fitting. On his third album he collaborated with several old music friends, including producer Brad Wood, who went on to work with Liz Phair, the Smashing Pumpkins and Pete Dinklage.

It was at Northwestern, where he studied radio, TV,

film and theater, that he met his best friend, David Schwimmer, who went on to become famous playing Ross on the TV show “Friends.”

“We entered a talent show where we rapped and won \$1,000,” Collins said, adding that he hopes the video never surfaces even though the duo were approached about opening for some big bands coming through Chicago. But that wasn’t meant to be, as Collins went to flight school and Schwimmer to Hollywood.

A return to music

After making “Lost in the Big Picture” he took 20 years off from music. His wife at the time did not particularly care for his music, so “I put the guitars away.” Two decades later, the marriage came to an end.

“The first thing I said was I’m coming back to the studio,” Collins said, adding that it felt good to be back in a place he found “fascinating.” He worked on a few smaller projects before deciding to do a full album, which would become his fourth release, “Squander,” which he described as “a very cathartic album about being in a dark place and coming to the light.” It was released in 2013.

After leaving the Navy he got a job with Delta in 1998, and in 2016, as a Delta captain, his music was being played on all their airplanes after the company found out about his musical side. Soon afterwards he released “Borrowed Time,” his fifth album.

Drawing from experiences of his youth

On “The Land Where Wishes Comes True” Collins takes memories from his youth, especially of his time with his father.

“We would drive around and I was, you know, very young, and I would go with him,” Collins said. “We’d visit these small farmers and their families and I’d see them and they’re happy and they’re, you know, they’re working hard, and the kids are out there helping and I just thought it was, you know, sepia tone nostalgia and I look back on it, it was kind of beautiful. And so that really struck me.”

Lots of famous help

The list of musicians who perform on Collins’ latest album is like a Who’s Who in the music world. In all there are over 60 Grammys between them (either Grammys they have won or their recordings have received, including Kenny Aronoff, James LoMenzo, Jimmy Zavala, Smokin’ Brett Resnick and Michael Cleveland. He met Cleveland around 2001 in Bardstown.

“I was downtown at the courtyard, and I heard this fiddle playing.” Collins said. “And I look up and there’s

iddle playing, Collins said. And I look up and there's this kid with a fiddle. He's probably 19, 20 at the time. And I was blown away. It was Michael Cleveland. And I just stood there mesmerized. So that was another kind of musical Bardstown connection.”

Recording an album during the pandemic also proved challenging, Collins said.

“The latest album and covid did have an impact. Oh, heck, yeah, it had an impact,” he said. “We were supposed to go in the studio in March, I had vacation with the company, everything was all set up, and then we had lock down. So we had to push it a month. And so I had to basically do all the demos in my little studio in my garage.” He even tested positive for the coronavirus but has since recovered.

A lot of the album was done remotely by sending tracks to various musicians and having them add their part to it. Collins was able to work with Aronoff in the drummer's North Hollywood studio. He was introduced to Aronoff at a party and they bonded over their love of Kentucky bourbon, and have remained friends. Through that friendship Collins has met Billy Gibbons, Stephen Stills and Peter Frampton.

“And that's how we had to do it,” Collins said. “So we had people in Nashville, we have people in Louisville, people in Chicago, you know, all over the country that were doing their part. So we had to build a really strong foundation with the, you know, the rhythm section with Kenny and (bassist) James (LoMenzo), and then we built it from there.”

To find out more, visit deanmcollins.com.



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