

= Gillian Welch =

Gillian Howard Welch (/ ɡɪˈliən ˈwɛltʃ / ; born October 2 , 1967) is an American singer @-@ songwriter . She performs with her musical partner , guitarist David Rawlings . Their sparse and dark musical style , which combines elements of Appalachian music , bluegrass , and Americana , is described by The New Yorker as " at once innovative and obliquely reminiscent of past rural forms "

Welch and Rawlings have released five critically acclaimed albums under the name Gillian Welch and two under the name Dave Rawlings Machine . Their 1996 debut , Revival , and the 2001 release Time (The Revelator) , received nominations for the Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Folk Album . Their 2003 album , Soul Journey , introduced electric guitar , drums and a more upbeat sound to their body of work . After a gap of eight years , they released their fifth studio album , The Harrow & The Harvest , in 2011 , which was also nominated for a Grammy for Best Contemporary Folk Album .

Welch was associate producer and performed on two songs of the O Brother , Where Art Thou ? soundtrack , a platinum album that won the Grammy Award for Album of the Year in 2002 . Welch has collaborated and recorded with distinguished musicians such as Alison Krauss , Ryan Adams , Jay Farrar , Emmylou Harris , the Decemberists , and Ani DiFranco .

= = Early life = =

Gillian Howard Welch was born on October 2 , 1967 in New York City , and was adopted by Ken and Mitzie Welch , comedy and music entertainers . Her biological mother was a freshman in college , and her father was a musician visiting New York City . Welch has speculated that her biological father could have been one of her favorite musicians , and she later discovered from her adoptive parents that he was a drummer . Alec Wilkinson of The New Yorker stated that " from an address they had been given , it appeared that her mother ... may have grown up in the mountains of North Carolina " . When Welch was three , her adoptive parents moved to Los Angeles to write music for The Carol Burnett Show . They also appeared on The Tonight Show .

As a youngster , Welch was introduced to the music of American folk singers Bob Dylan , Woody Guthrie , and the Carter Family . She performed folk songs with her peers at the Westland Elementary School in Los Angeles . Welch later attended Crossroads School , a high school in Santa Monica , California . While in high school , a local television program featured her as a student who " excelled at everything she did " .

When a student at the University of California , Santa Cruz , Welch played bass in a goth band , and drums in a psychedelic surf band . In college , a roommate played an album by the bluegrass band The Stanley Brothers , and she had an epiphany :

The first song came on and I just stood up and I kind of walked into the other room as if I was in a tractor beam and stood there in front of the stereo . It was just as powerful as the electric stuff , and it was songs I 'd grown up singing . All of a sudden I 'd found my music .

After graduating from UC Santa Cruz with a degree in photography , Welch attended the Berklee College of Music in Boston , where she majored in songwriting . During her two years studying at Berklee , Welch gained confidence as a performer . Welch met her music partner David Rawlings at a successful audition for Berklee 's only country band .

= = Career = =

Upon finishing college in 1992 , Welch and Rawlings moved to Nashville , Tennessee . She recalled , " I looked at my record collection and saw that all the music I loved had been made in Nashville ? Bill Monroe , Dylan , the Stanley Brothers , Neil Young ? so I moved there . Not ever thinking I was thirty years too late . " Rawlings soon followed . In Nashville , after singing " Long Black Veil " , the two first realized that their voices harmonized well and they started to perform as a duo . They never considered using a working name , so the duo were simply billed as " Gillian Welch " . A year after

moving to Nashville , Welch found a manager , Denise Stiff , who already managed Alison Krauss . Both Welch and Stiff ignored frequent advice that Welch should stop playing with Rawlings and join a band . They eventually signed a recording contract with Almo Sounds . Following a performance opening for Peter Rowan at the Station Inn , producer T @-@ Bone Burnett expressed interest in recording an album . Burnett did not plan to disturb Welch 's and Rawlings ' preference for minimal instrumentation , and Welch agreed to take him on as a producer .

= = = Revival = = =

For the recording sessions of Welch 's debut , Revival , Burnett wanted to recapture the bare sound of Welch 's live performance . Welch recalled , " That first week was really intense . It was just T @-@ Bone , the engineer , and Dave and myself . We got so inside our little world . There was very little distance between our singing and playing . The sound was very immediate . It was so light and small . " Later , they recorded several more songs and played with an expanded group of musicians ; guitarist and Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee James Burton , bassist Roy Huskey , Jr . , and veteran session drummers Jim Keltner , and Buddy Harman .

The album was released in April 1996 to positive reviews . Mark Deming of Allmusic called it a " superb debut " and wrote , " Welch 's debts to artists of the past are obvious and clearly acknowledged , but there 's a maturity , intelligence , and keen eye for detail in her songs you wouldn 't expect from someone simply trying to ape the Carter Family . " Bill Friskics @-@ Warren of No Depression praised the album as " breathtakingly austere evocations of rural culture " . The Arlington Heights , Illinois Daily Herald 's Mark Guarino observed that Revival was " cheered and scrutinized as a staunch revivalist of Depression @-@ era music only because her originals sounded so much like that era . " He attributed this to the biblical imagery of the lyrics , Burnett 's threadbare production , and the plainly @-@ sung bleakness in Welch 's vocals . Ann Powers of Rolling Stone gave Revival a lukewarm review and criticized Welch for not singing of her own experiences , and " manufacturing emotion . " Robert Christgau echoed Powers : Welch " just doesn 't have the voice , eye , or way with words to bring her simulation off . " Revival was nominated for the 1997 Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Folk Album , but lost to Bruce Springsteen 's The Ghost of Tom Joad .

= = = Hell Among The Yearlings = = =

The duo 's 1998 Hell Among the Yearlings continued the rustic and dark themes ; the songs ' subject matter varies from a female character killing a rapist , a mining accident , a murder ballad , and an ode to morphine before death . Like Revival , Hell Among The Yearlings featured a sparse style that focused on Rawlings and Welch 's voices and guitars .

The album also received favorable reviews . Robert Wilonsky of the Dallas Observer observed that Welch " inhabits a role so completely , the fiction separating character and audience disappears " . Thom Owens (Allmusic) stated that the album " lacks some of the focus " of Revival , but is " a thoroughly satisfying second album " and proof that her debut was not a fluke . No Depression 's Farnum Brown commended the live and " immediate feel " of the album , Welch 's clawhammer banjo , and Rawlings ' harmonies . Similar to Revival , Welch was praised for reflecting influences such as the Stanley Brothers , but still managing to create an original sound , while Chris Herrington from Minneapolis 's City Pages criticized the songs ' lack of authenticity . He wrote " Welch doesn 't write folk songs ; she writes folk songs about writing folk songs . "

= = = O Brother , Where Art Thou ? = = =

Welch sang two songs and served as the associate producer for the Burnett @-@ produced soundtrack to the 2000 film of the same name . She shared vocals with Alison Krauss on a rendition of the gospel song " I 'll Fly Away . " Dave McKenna of The Washington Post praised their version : the singers " soar together . " Burnett and Welch wrote additional lyrics for the song " Didn 't Leave

Nobody but the Baby , " sung by Welch , Emmylou Harris , and Krauss . The song is an elaboration of an old Mississippi tune discovered by Alan Lomax , and was nominated for the 2002 Grammy Award for Best Country Collaboration with Vocals . The platinum album won the 2002 Grammy Award for Album of the Year . The surprise success of the soundtrack gave Welch a career boost . Welch also made a cameo appearance in the film .

= = = Time (The Revelator) = = =

When Universal Music Group purchased Almo Sounds , Welch began her own independent label , Acony Records (named for the Appalachian wildflower , Acony Bell , subject of the song of that name on Revival) . Rawlings produced the first release on Welch 's new label , the 2001 album Time (The Revelator) . All but one song on the album was recorded in the historic RCA Studio B in Nashville . " I Want To Sing That Rock and Roll " was recorded live at the Ryman Auditorium in the recording sessions for the concert film Down from the Mountain .

Welch has said the album is about American history , rock ' n ' roll , and country music . There are songs about the assassination of Abraham Lincoln , the Titanic Disaster , John Henry , and Elvis Presley . Time continues Welch and Rawlings ' style of mellow and sparse arrangements . Welch explained , " As opposed to being little tiny folk songs or traditional songs , they 're really tiny rock songs . They 're just performed in this acoustic setting . In our heads we went electric without changing instruments . "

Time (The Revelator) received extensive critical praise , most of which focused on the evolution of lyrics from mountain ballads . For Michael Shannon Friedman of The Charleston Gazette , " Welch 's soul @-@ piercing , backwoods quaver has always been a treasure , but on this record her songwriting is absolutely stunning . " Critics compare the last track , the 15 @-@ minute " I Dream a Highway " , to classics by Bob Dylan and Neil Young . Zac Johnson of Allmusic described I Dream ... as akin to " sweetly dozing in the [river] current like Huck and Jim 's Mississippi River afternoons " . No Depression 's Grant Alden wrote , " Welch and Rawlings have gathered ... fragments from across the rich history of American music and reset them as small , subtle jewels adorning their own keenly observed , carefully constructed language . " Time finished thirteenth in the 2001 Village Voice Pazz & Jop music critic poll . Time (The Revelator) appeared in best of decade lists of Rolling Stone , Paste , Uncut , The Irish Times , and the Ottawa Citizen . The album was nominated for the 2002 Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Folk Album , but lost to Bob Dylan 's Love and Theft . Time peaked at No. 7 on the Billboard Independent Album chart .

The Revelator Collection DVD was released in 2002 . It featured live performances and music videos of songs from Time , and some covers . The concert footage was filmed in 2001 , and the music videos included Welch and Rawlings performing three songs at RCA Studio B. No Depression 's Barry Mazar praised the DVD as an accompaniment for Time , calling it " one last exclamation point on that memorable and important project " .

= = = Soul Journey = = =

For the 2003 release , Soul Journey , Welch and Rawlings explored new territory . Welch said : " I wanted to make it a happier record . Out of our four records , I thought this might be the one where you 're driving down the road listening to it on a sunny summer day . " Rawlings again produced the record . The album also reflected a change in the typically sparse instrumentation : Welch and Rawlings introduced a dobro , violin , electric bass and drums , and Welch later said , " Everything 's not supposed to sound the same , you want it to reflect change and growth . "

In three songs of Soul Journey , for the first time Welch and Rawlings recorded their own versions of traditional folk songs . On the original compositions , Welch 's lyrics are more autobiographical than previous albums .

The album received mixed reviews . Allmusic 's Zac Johnson wrote that it was " too casual and off @-@ the @-@ cuff " , but called it a " wonderful , dusty summertime front @-@ porch album , full of whiskey drawls and sly smiles , floorboard stomps and screen @-@ door creaks " . Jon Caramanica

of Rolling Stone criticized the slower songs as stagnant , but complimented the upbeat songs . Soul Journey also garnered significant acclaim . John Harris of Mojo magazine described the album as " pretty much perfect " , and Uncut 's Barney Hoskyns favorably compared it to Bob Dylan and The Band 's The Basement Tapes . Will Hermes of Entertainment Weekly wrote that Welch has " never sounded deeper , realer , or sexier . " Soul Journey peaked at No. 107 on the Billboard charts , and reached No. 3 for Independent Albums .

= = = Dave Rawlings Machine = = =

Welch and Rawlings continued their partnership in the band Dave Rawlings Machine . Welch co @-@ wrote five of the songs with Rawlings , and provided guitar and harmony vocals . Andy Gill of The Independent described the 2009 debut album A Friend of a Friend as " akin to one of Welch 's albums , but with the balance of their harmonies swapped to favour Rawlings ' voice " . Although ostensibly Rawlings ' first solo album , Alex Ramon of PopMatters noted the similarities to Welch albums . Paste Magazine 's Stephen Deusner praised A Friend of a Friend for incorporating " a wide swath of traditional American music , " comments echoed by Rolling Stone 's Will Hermes and in the PopMatters piece .

On September 18 , 2015 , the duo released their second album under the band title Dave Rawlings Machine , Nashville Obsolete . The band includes Willie Watson , Paul Kowert , Brittany Haas , and occasionally includes Jordan Tice .

= = = The Harrow & The Harvest = = =

In a 2007 feature in The Guardian , critic John Harris expressed frustration that there had not been a Gillian Welch release in four years . Creation Records founder Alan McGee showed optimism about Welch and Rawlings testing out some new songs while opening some concerts for Rilo Kiley , and wrote in a 2009 blog entry " the long gestation period signals nothing less than a perfect album " . In 2009 , Rawlings said that recording for the next Gillian Welch album has started , but did not give a release date .

The Harrow & The Harvest was released on June 28 , 2011 . Welch attributed the long time period between releases to dissatisfaction with the songs they were writing . She explained : " Our songcraft slipped and I really don 't know why . It 's not uncommon . It 's something that happens to writers . It 's the deepest frustration we have come through , hence the album title . " The writing process involved " this endless back and forth between the two of us , " Welch said , stating that " It ? s our most intertwined , co @-@ authored , jointly @-@ composed album . "

The album received praise from publications such as The Los Angeles Times , Uncut , and Rolling Stone . Thom Jurek of Allmusic wrote that the album " is stunning for its intimacy , its lack of studio artifice , its warmth and its timeless , if hard won , songcraft " .

The album peaked at No. 20 on the US Billboard 200 and No. 25 on the UK Albums Chart . It was nominated for a Grammy for Best Contemporary Folk Album , as well as Best Engineered Album .

= = Musical style = =

Welch and Rawlings incorporate elements of early twentieth century music such as old time , classic country , gospel and traditional bluegrass with modern elements of rhythm and blues , rock ' n ' roll , jazz , and punk rock . The New Yorker 's Alec Wilkinson maintained their musical style is " not easily classified ? it is at once innovative and obliquely reminiscent of past rural forms " .

The instrumentation on their songs is usually a simple arrangement , with Welch and Rawlings accompanying their own vocals with acoustic guitars , banjos , or a mandolin . Welch plays rhythm guitar with a 1956 Gibson J @-@ 50 (or banjo) , while Rawlings plays lead on a 1935 Epiphone Olympic Guitar . The New Yorker 's Wilkinson described Rawlings as a " strikingly inventive guitarist " who plays solos that are " daring melodic leaps " . A review in No Depression by Andy Moore observed that Rawlings " squeezes , strokes , chokes and does just about everything but blow into "

his guitar .

= = = Themes = = =

Many songs performed by Welch and Rawlings contain dark themes about social outcasts struggling against such elements as poverty , drug addiction , death , a disconnection from their family , and an unresponsive God . Despite Welch being the lead singer , several of these characters are male . Welch has commented , " To be commercial , everybody wants happy love songs . People would flat @-@ out ask me , ' Don 't you have any happy love songs ? ' Well , as a matter of fact , I don 't . I 've got songs about orphans and morphine addicts . " To reflect these themes , Welch and Rawlings often employ a slow pace to their songs . Their tempo is compared to a " slow heartbeat " , and Cowperthwait of Rolling Stone observed that their songs " can lull you into near @-@ hypnosis and then make your jaw drop with one final revelation " .

= = = Reception = = =

Welch has received broad critical praise . Geoffrey Himes of The Washington Post described Welch as " one of the most interesting singer @-@ songwriters of her generation " . In 2003 , Tom Kietly of The Boston Globe observed that she was " quietly establishing one of the most impressive catalogs in contemporary roots music " , and a 2007 piece in The Guardian by John Harris called Welch " one of the decade 's greatest talents " . Critic Robert Hilburn of the Los Angeles Times wrote , " At every turn , she demonstrates a spark and commitment that should endear her to anyone from country and folk to pop and rock fans who appreciate imagination and heart . "

When Welch 's first two albums came out , critics questioned the authenticity of her music , as she was raised in Southern California , but performed Appalachian themed songs . For Revival , Welch was criticized for " manufacturing emotion " , and a review of Hell Among the Yearlings by Chris Herrington of City Pages stated , " Welch is someone who discovered old @-@ time music in college and decided that her own sheltered life could never be worth writing about " , and that she is " completely devoid of individuality " . Other critics rejected the notion that her background affects the authenticity of her music . Music critic Mark Kemp defended Welch in a The New York Times piece :

The first @-@ person protagonist of Ms. Welch 's song (" Caleb Meyer ") may be a young girl from a time and place that Ms. Welch will never fully understand , but the feelings the singer expresses about rape , and the respect she displays for her chosen musical genre , are nothing if not poignantly authentic . Likewise , it matters not whether Ms. Welch has ever walked the streets of " the black dust towns of East Tennessee " about which she sings in " Miner 's Refrain " because the sense of foreboding that she expresses for the men who once labored in coal mines with futile hopes of a better life comes through loud and clear .

The Wall Street Journal 's Taylor Holliday echoed this : " Stingy critics give Ms. Welch a hard time because she 's a California city girl , not an Appalachian coal miner 's daughter . But as Lucinda or Emmylou might attest , love of the music is not a birthright , but an earned right . Listen to Ms. Welch yodel , in a tune about that no @-@ good " gal " Morphine , and you know she 's as mountain as they come . "

On September 16 , 2015 the duo was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award for Songwriting by the Americana Music Association .

= = = Influences and collaborations = = =

Welch emphasizes music from a previous era as her major influence . She said that " by and large I listen to people who are dead . I 'm really of the tried @-@ and @-@ true school . I let 50 years go by and see what 's really relevant . " Welch has acknowledged inspiration from several traditional country artists , including the Stanley Brothers , the Carter Family , the Louvin Brothers , and the Blue Sky Boys . She explained her relationship with traditional music by saying , " I 've never tried to

be traditional . It 's been a springboard for me and I love it and revere it and would not be doing what I do without the music of the Monroe Brothers , the Stanley Brothers and the Carter Family . However , it was clear I was never going to be able to do exactly that ; I 'm a songwriter . "

In addition to the strong country influence , Welch also draws on a repertoire of such rock ' n ' roll artists as Bob Dylan , Chuck Berry , Neil Young , the Grateful Dead and the Velvet Underground . She has noted alternative rock bands Throwing Muses , Pixies and Camper Van Beethoven " don 't directly inform my music , but they 're in there . "

Welch has recorded songs with a variety of notable artists , including Ryan Adams , Ani DiFranco , Emmylou Harris , Jay Farrar , Alison Krauss , Old Crow Medicine Show , Bright Eyes , Robyn Hitchcock , Steve Earle , Ralph Stanley , The Decemberists , Solomon Burke and Mark Knopfler . Welch and Rawlings ' contributions on Hitchcock 's album Spooked was described by Christopher Bahn of The A.V. Club as " subtle but vital " . She later created the cover art for Hitchcock 's 2014 album The Man Upstairs . Mark Deming of Allmusic wrote that their work on Ryan Adams ' album Heartbreaker " brought out the best in Adams " .

Artists who have recorded songs written by Welch include Jimmy Buffett , Alison Krauss and Union Station , Trisha Yearwood , Joan Baez , Allison Moorer , Emmylou Harris , Miranda Lambert , Kathy Mattea and ZZ Top .

= = = Performances = = =

Welch and Rawlings have played many music festivals , including The Newport Folk Festival , Coachella Festival , The Telluride Bluegrass Festival , The Cambridge Folk Festival , MerleFest , The Austin City Limits Festival , and Farm Aid . They have toured North America extensively , and have played in Europe , Australia , and New Zealand . Concert reviews have praised the chemistry between Welch and Rawlings on stage . Tizzy Asher of the Seattle Post @-@ Intelligencer wrote " there was a startling unspoken intimacy between them . They anticipated each other 's movements and shifted when necessary to fit each other . "

The Dave Rawlings Machine have toured North America , with the band originally composed of Rawlings , Welch and three members of Old Crow Medicine Show . The band is currently composed of Rawlings , Welch , Willie Watson , Paul Kowart , and Brittany Haas . Welch and Rawlings also participate in group tours with notable musicians . In 2004 , they were part of the Sweet Harmony Traveling Revue , a three @-@ week US tour with Patty Griffin , Buddy Miller and Emmylou Harris . In 2009 , The Dave Rawlings Machine joined Old Crow Medicine Show , the Felice Brothers and Justin Townes Earle for the Big Surprise Tour , a US tour described as a " roots @-@ music extravaganza " . In 2011 , Welch was a support act for the recently reformed Buffalo Springfield .

= = Discography = =

1996 ? Revival Almo Sounds

1998 ? Hell Among the Yearlings Acony Records

2001 ? Time (The Revelator) Acony Records

2003 ? Soul Journey Acony Records

2009 ? A Friend of a Friend (as Dave Rawlings Machine) Acony Records

2011 ? The Harrow & The Harvest Acony Records

2015 ? Nashville Obsolete (as Dave Rawlings Machine) Acony Records