**TERRI HENDRIX**

**BIO**

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MARTINDALE, Texas — Terri Hendrix laughs easily when people comment on her boundless, resilient energy. But it's a laugh that also conveys, in no uncertain terms, that *none* of it comes easy.

“I am drawn to people who seem fearless and brilliantly composed in the face of adversity," she says, and it goes without saying that Hendrix aspires to that same kind of courage and composure herself. In the 31 years since braving her first open mic, the acclaimed San Antonio-born songwriter has released nearly 20 albums on her own Wilory Records label, garnered three generations of fans from coast to coast and overseas, run workshops from the Texas Gulf Coast to the Berklee College of Music, and founded a flourishing 501 C3 non-profit music community center, the OYOU (which stands for "Own Your Own Universe"). And she's done it all with a can-do smile and seemingly indomitable spirit while simultaneously waging a lifelong battle to control epilepsy.

Part of it, she admits, is a conscious element of her public persona: an always-show-them-your-smile trait she learned by example from one of the best in the biz. "My hero is Dolly Parton, who I worshipped as a kid growing up," she explains. "That's who I've *always* idolized, so, you know ..." She smiles again. But as the hard-working, take-charge Parton herself could surely testify, you can't fake determination — and true resilience, like grace and grit, only reveals itself under pressure. It's also a work in progress, an endurance test you have to take again and again, like a never-ending marathon. And it just so happens that Hendrix, who ran cross country track in high school, has always had the stamina to go the distance — and just as importantly, the heart to pick herself up and carry on after every fall.

For years, Hendrix kept her seizure condition private, even from her longtime recording and touring partner (and legendary producer/Austin City Limits Hall of Famer) Lloyd Maines. But she decided more than a decade ago to face it head on and finally open up about it, knowing that sharing her experiences — scares and triumphs alike — could possibly help others. It helped *her*, too, emboldening her art and life immeasurably — most notably by inspiring her to launch the OYOU in 2012 as a means to make the mind, body, and spirit-transforming power of music and the creative arts accessible to everyone, regardless of age, gender, income, or physical mobility. In 2017, Hendrix sold her home in San Marcos, Texas, in order to purchase six acres in nearby Martindale with the intention of clearing the cactus and mesquite-covered rocky land to build a permanent, rent-free home for the OYOU, thus allowing all of the non-profit’s fundraising efforts to go toward programing, paying workshop teachers, and scholarships. Soon she would purchase an additional six acres, naming the entire property Wilory Farm in honor of the late mentor Marion Williamson — the philanthropist, musician, teacher, and owner of the “original” Wilory Farm who took a young Hendrix under her wing in the early 90s and taught her how to proactively manage her epilepsy well enough to have a fighting chance at living her dream. The wisdom Hendrix gleaned from Williamson in exchange for milking goats is part of the reason she’s still here today, and why she’s worked so hard to own her *own* universe every step of the way. Hendrix is the rare artist with a decade-spanning discography who has always owned every one of her master recordings, from her 1996 debut *Two Dollar Shoes* to the five thematically linked albums comprising her recently completed “Project 5,” by far the most ambitious artistic endeavor of her career to date.

Hendrix began her Project 5 marathon a decade ago, when she started to notice that many of the new songs she was writing at the time all seemed to touch on the same recurring themes of love, hope, and resilience. Song by song, like chapters in a book, a bigger picture began to come into focus — and to do it justice, Hendrix knew she was going to need a *big* canvas. Thus 2016's *Love You Strong,* the long-awaited follow-up to her acclaimed 2011 album *Cry Till You Laugh*, was subtitled "Project 5.1,” and followed just eight months later by *The Slaughterhouse Sessions* (Project 5.2). In September 2019, she released Projects 5.3 and 5.4: *Talk to a Human* and *Who Is Ann*?, and she just completed the final piece of the puzzle, *Pilgrim’s Progress (Project 5.5),* set for release on Sept. 3, 2021.

Never much for fences, Hendrix has blurred, twisted, and danced across genre lines going all the way back to her debut. Subsequent releases like *Wilory Farm, Places in Between, The Ring*, *The Art of Removing Wallpaper, The Spiritual Kind,* and *Cry Till You Laugh* all followed free-range suit, reinforcing her reputation as a gifted writer, singer, and multi-instrumentalist (guitar, mandolin, and harmonica) with a sound unfettered by the limits of categorization, let alone any label — literal or figurative — but her own. “My work doesn’t have a genre,” she acknowledges. “It has a mission, and that mission is resilience, rebounding, and courage.” But, given more room to roam than ever across the sprawl of Project 5, she approached each “chapter” as a means to examine the central themes from a distinctly different musical and emotional angle. So it's by design that confessional, heart-on-sleeve folk dominates *Love You Strong,* while *The Slaughterhouse Sessions* skews more towards politically charged, harmonica-blasted blues and rafter-shaking gospel. The freewheeling *Talk to a Human* takes all of the above and adds pop, jazz, and even Tex-Mex to the mix, an eclectic melting pot befitting its emphasis on the need for more empathy and heart-to-heart connection in today's world. And with the five-track EP *Who Is Ann?,* arguably the darkest and emotionally rawest 17 minutes of music she's ever recorded, Hendrix taps into her unabashed love of electronica and home-studio sample mixing to ruminate deeply on loss and depression — albeit with just enough light cutting through the dark to keep hope alive.

And make no mistake: Hendrix, she with that ever-present smile onstage and in public, knows from darkness. Both *Talk to a Human* and *Who Is Ann* are dedicated to her beloved older sister Tammi, whose unexpected passing in March 2018 shook Terri to her core. “I didn’t know if I could get through losing her, she was so much a part of my soul,” she says, adding that ever since, “I walk around with half a heart.” But nevertheless, after months in the emotional gutter, she pulled herself up and powered forward — not passing "through" her grief so much as absorbing it all and carrying it with her to the end. But the hits kept coming. After releasing *Talk to a Human* and *Who Is Ann,* Hendrix was still determined to complete Project 5 according to her *original* plan: with a memoir about her first-hand experiences living (and touring) with epilepsy. She’d actually been working on *that* part of the puzzle ever since 2003, when she began revisiting her journals and medical records after being jolted by the wake-up call of her first serious grand Mal seizure in years. But when the pandemic and quarantine of 2020 forced the cancellation of every gig on her calendar for months on end — and the loss of every grant for the OYOU — she had to pivot all of her creative energies into producing a steady stream of online workshops and a monthly virtual concert series, “Live from Wilory Farm,” just to stay afloat. And all of that while she was *also* coming to grips with a new medical diagnosis that she knew could potentially be even more disruptive to her livelihood than epilepsy: spasmodic dysphonia and an essential vocal tremor, which had begun to hamper her ability not just to sing, but to *talk.* “I fell into a very dark place,” she says, admitting that she came very close to wanting to quit — and not just Project 5.

But just when she felt her resiliency at a critical all-time low, the support of her fans, friends, and family loved her strong again. “My friends and fans sent cards and encouraging words, and their voluntary tips during the live streams and donations for the online workshops literally save the farm, the OYOU, and me,” she marvels. Buoyed by gratitude, Hendrix picked herself up and charged forward with a renewed sense of purpose that carried her across the Project 5 finish line with *Pilgrim’s Progress.* Her decision to put a pin in her memoir and instead close the project with a brand new album — arguably as much of a surprise to herself as it was to her fans — was equal parts prudent due diligence and inspired whim. Simply put, she felt she still needed more time on the book not just to do right by her own journey, but more importantly because of her belief in her story’s potential to help others facing similar health challenges. And as for the “whim”? Call it an epiphany: that the best way to end Project 5 was to bring things full circle back home. She wrote the title track to *Love You Strong* thinking of her father’s devotion to being her mother’s full-time care giver, and it was their tighter-than-ever father/daughter bonding in the wake of Tammi’s passing that ultimately inspired her to finally honor Command Sergeant Major James Hendrix’s oft-repeated request for her to make an album of his“kind of music” — *country music.* Terri figured it was the least she could do for the man who also showed her her first guitar chords, on the guitar she “borrowed” from her sister.

“It’s still not totally country enough for him,” Hendrix admits with a laugh, "but he’s really happy with it. And to see him really happy with something that Lloyd and I have created makes *me* happy.”

Recorded in early 2021 at Hendrix and Maines’ respective home studios and at The Zone in Dripping Springs, Texas, *Pilgrim’s Progress* is the first album she’s ever made comprised entirely of covers. But every song on the album is as revelatory and close to her heart as any song she’s ever written, and all of them are right in line with the themes of love, hope, and resilience (*and* family) threaded throughout the four albums that preceded it in Project 5. To wit: In addition to choice favorites from some of her biggest songwriting heroes (including Dolly Parton and the late greats John Prine, Jerry Jeff Walker, and Cindy Walker), highlights include the Bob Wills/Patsy Cline classic “Faded Love” — one of the first songs Terri remembers singing and playing with her dad as a child, treated here to a gorgeous new arrangement by Maines — and the Delmore Brothers’ “Blues Stay Away from Me, which featuring harmony vocals by Sergeant Major Hendrix himself. And then there’s the closing title track, a late career masterpiece by fellow Texan Kris Kristofferson that speaks volumes not just about where Hendrix feels she is nowin both her life and career, but also her determination to keep on moving forward. Because *this* pilgrim knows that even with Project 5 at long last in her rearview, the road still ahead promises to be just as challenging — and ultimately rewarding.

It’s worth noting that all of Hendrix’s hard work to date has hardly gone unrecognized. Project 5 has already garnered her some of the warmest reviews of her career (from the *Austin Chronicle* noting that *Love You Strong*’s "grounded reality strikes with a refreshing — and empowering — honesty” to blogger Donald Teplyske of Fervor Coulee hailing *Who Is Ann?* as "a seventeen-minute master class in pushing through personal expectations”). There have been many other raves over the years, too, from the likes of *Mojo*, *Billboard*, *Harp*, *USA* *Today*, the *Washington Post*, the *Boston Herald*, *Texas* *Monthly*, *Texas* *Music*, and *No* *Depression*, and she remains humbled by the loyalty of her fans and the support of the independent radio programers and talent bookers around the world. She’s also been blessed with the opportunity to co-write a Grammy-winning song (the Dixie Chicks' instrumental "Lil' Jack Slade"), received a star on the South Texas Music Walk of Fame, won handfuls of regional music awards in both Austin and San Antonio, and been honored with St. Mary's University's Art of Peace Award and an induction into the San Marcos Women's Hall of Fame. But although she’s never taken any of that for granted, for her the goal of the journey has never been about collecting accolades or even reaching any specific end point.

For Hendrix, the goal has always been about growth. It’s about meeting adversity head-on and refusing to give up, be it to epilepsy, depression, vocal tremors, or anything else life can throw at her. It’s about challenging *herself* to stay in the game, stay inspired, and above all, to stay true to her faith that through music, art, and the OYOU, she can hopefully help other pilgrims find their way and carry onward, too.

"I have a lot I still want to write — I feel like I'm not even remotely on level *two* of where I want to go as far as my writing," she says. "The story I want to write with my life is that I did *everything* I set out to do. So, I don't look at Project 5 as the pinnacle of anything. I'm proud of it, and I feel proud of all the music I've done to date. But my job is to keep reaching for a new level of artistic integrity — and to do all I can to not only make a positive difference while I’m here on this earth, but to build something that will hopefully continue to make a difference long after I’m gone.”