

JANIE FRICKE

by Tamela Meredith Partridge
"Our Brown County" magazine
Nashville, IN
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Country singer, Janie Fricke, a northern Indiana native, is returning to her midwestern roots on Saturday, April 1, at the Little Nashville Opry.

"I just love coming home to Indiana," says Fricke, who was raised on a 400-acre farm in South Whitley, Indiana. "The Little Nashville Opry is always a wonderful venue to come back to because we'll get to meet family, friends, followers, and some new fans attending the show."

Fricke was influenced by a variety of music during her childhood.

"My father played guitar and mother played piano and organ, so my sister and I were surrounded by music at an early age," Fricke says. "I also listened to all styles of female singers ranging from Patsy Cline to Connie Francis, Brenda Lee, Barbra Streisand, Rita Coolidge, Joan Baez, and Judy Collins," Fricke says. "I also loved pop, rock, and the Motown sound, such as The Supremes and The Box Tops. I listened to everything."

Fricke began her music career by singing in church, local coffeehouses, high school events, and college.

"My parents wanted me to have a back-up career, just in case I wasn't able to support myself musically," Fricke says. "So, in order to please my parents, I graduated from Indiana University with a degree in elementary education."

After graduation, Fricke pursued music full-time by working in Memphis, Dallas, and Los Angeles as a jingle singer for such top clients as United Airlines, Coca-Cola, 7-Up, and Red Lobster.

"What made me a popular jingle singer is that I was able to instantly change my voice style and sound upon command," Fricke says. "I could create a pop, R&B, country, jazz, rock, or whatever sound they were requesting at the moment just by changing up my voice. I obtained this skill as a child by singing along when my mom played all genres of music on her piano. It was a musically-rich training ground."



Moving to Nashville in '75, Fricke joined the Lea Jane Singers, where she often recorded three sessions a day, five days a week. Fricke's versatile voice contributed back-up to thousands of recordings including Crystal Gayle ("I'll Get Over You"), Ronnie Milsap ("I'm A Stand By My Woman Man"), Elvis Presley ("My Way"), Tanya Tucker ("Here's Some Love"), and Conway Twitty ("I'd Love To Lay You Down").

"The Lea Jane Singers were one of the top session groups in Nashville at the time," Fricke says. "It's completely different today. Now it's just individual session singers that go around and add harmony parts. I was lucky to be involved with such a tight-knit group as the Lea Jane Singers. The singing techniques, business aspects, and music industry contacts I made during that time were instrumental in preparing me for a future solo career."

Fricke first gained national attention when Johnny Duncan fans wanted to know who sang the line, "Shut out the light and lead me..." in his '77 chart-topping country single, "Stranger."

"Singing background vocals and duets was a fun part of my career," Fricke says. "I was so excited to have the opportunity to sing that step-out solo line on Johnny Duncan's single. I never dreamed it would eventually launch my solo career."

Fricke released her '77 debut single, "What're You Doing Tonight," followed by such Billboard #1 country hits as "Don't Worry 'Bout Me Baby," "It Ain't Easy Bein' Easy," "He's A Heartache (Lookin' For A Place To Happen)," and such Billboard #1 country duets as, "On My Knees" (with Charlie Rich), and "A Place To Fall Apart" (with Merle Haggard).

"I love ballads that are serious, deliver a message, and have strong content," Fricke says. "I also love up-tempo songs that are commercial sounding and have a good, driving beat to them. Both types of songs have to be well-written and excel lyrically. The quality of a song is very important to me."

Fricke's latest album, "Tributes To My Heroes," provides fresh interpretations to ten songs from such classic artists as Willie Nelson ("Midnight Rider"), Patsy Cline ("Leaving On Your Mind"), Lynn Anderson ("Isn't It Always Love"), Billy Vera and the Beaters ("At This Moment"), and Judy Collins ("Both Sides Now").

"I recorded this album in Texas on my home studio label, JMF Records," Fricke says. "My husband, Jeff Steele, did all the production and engineering. The first cut is Johnny Cash's 'Ring of Fire,' which we recorded before Johnny passed away. This ten-song collection is my way of sharing favorite songs from various musicians who've influenced my life and career in such a positive and memorable way."