

# Bloomington Connection Still Strong For World-Class Singer Moira Smiley

Moira Smiley.  
Courtesy photo



by Tracy Zollinger Turner  
Moira Smiley discovered the power of her voice in Bloomington. When she came to the Indiana University School of Music in 1994, she intended to major in piano performance. But as she connected with local musicians such as Malcolm Dalglish, she gravitated toward the study of folk music, folklore, and ethnomusicology, ultimately receiving her degree in early music vocal performance.

"The community of Bloomington and this rigorous music school felt like the perfect union of chal-

lenge and acceptance and encouragement," says Smiley, 41, who carved out her early success with a Bloomington-based female vocal quartet called Vida. She also taught alongside Dalglish at the outdoor singing camp Oolation.

Smiley has composed and performed work for film, stage, and television, and her vocals can be heard on more than 60 albums. Sometimes she sings in constellations of top international artists or with her innovative acoustic folksong quartet, VOCO. Other times, as in her new recording *Unzip the Horizon*, the sound and compositions are all her own.

Though she relocated to California in 2004, Smiley often returns to Indiana to record with David Weber at Airtime Studios. *Unzip the Horizon* is especially informed by two years of non-stop, nomadic travel around the world as she toured with bands Tune-Yards, SOLAS, and Jayme Stone's Lomax/Folklife Project.

"I'm very identified right now with being a traveler," Smiley says. "There's freedom and patience that traveling requires of you, and I feel like I hear that in these songs—the awareness of the bigger cycles of life and realizing that we aren't as stuck as we think we are."

When she wasn't performing, she collected music and researched methods of singing in the Ukraine, Bulgaria, and Albania. She also volunteered at refugee camps in France and Greece, bringing her own expertise as a teacher of songs and body percussion, but also doing practical tasks like "delivering medical supplies and socks and trying to fix the internet," she says.

"The record has a lot of forgiveness in it," Smiley says. "I think some of that wisdom came home to me in working with the refugees because they have to hold that truth very close—you're not stuck and you can forgive."

Looking forward, Smiley is one of eight composers commissioned to set Kurt Vonnegut's "Requiem" to music by the Bloomington chamber vocal group Voces Novae. The piece will be performed in full in May 2019.

For more information, visit [moirasmiley.com](http://moirasmiley.com). \*



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