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## Sevier County hit maker Lisa McCarter returns to music with Runaway Home

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[KENNETH BURNS](#)



Runaway Home is, from left, Gary Culley, Lisa McCarter and Mark Elliott.

Nashville was different in the 1980s.

“It was very easy for us,” said singer Lisa McCarter. “These days, there’s no way you could just walk into Warner Bros. and sit down and sing for an A/R (artists and repertoire) person or president. But back then, that’s what we got to do.”

Lisa was one-third of the country group the McCarters, along with sisters Jennifer and Teresa. The Sevier County natives notched several top-10 country hits, including “The Gift” and “Timeless and True Love.”

These days, Lisa is busy with a new group, Runaway Home, an Americana combo that has performed together for three years. Joining McCarter in the group are longtime Nashville musicians Mark Elliott and Gary Culley.

At noon on Saturday, Aug. 3, Runaway Home plays live on “The Blue Plate Special,” the show on Knoxville’s WDVX-89.9 FM. Admission is free to attend the broadcast, which airs from the Knoxville Visitor Center at 301 South Gay St. WDVX also can be heard at [wdvx.com](http://wdvx.com).

Runaway Home's self-titled debut CD, which came out last year, features delicate acoustic arrangements and soaring harmony vocals. On tracks like "Bye Bye Mary Jane," "Exit 201" and "Can You Hear My Song," the trio sings about domesticity, loss and life on the road. The group pays tribute to its musical inspirations with "Harry, Jim and John" – as in Chapin, Croce and Denver.

"Their songs are great," said McCarter of her band mates' material. "They tell a story with meaning that people can relate to, like songs by Dolly Parton and Emmylou Harris and all of those awesome people who are influences on me. That's the kind of songs Mark and Gary write."

With husband Chip and sister Teresa, Lisa lives just west of Nashville in Kingston Springs. She first met Elliott and Culley at the Fillin' Station, a Kingston Springs bar and grill. "We always go there to get a hamburger," she said.

One night, she recalled, "These guys were singing. They were singing songs I grew up on. Three months later, they came to the same place. I introduced myself and said, 'Man, I would love to sing harmony with you guys.' So we gathered around the kitchen table, and what was supposed to be a couple songs became 45 songs."

McCarter credits Elliott and Culley with helping lift her from a funk. "I had developed calluses on my vocal cords, and I couldn't sing for two years," she said. "I kind of went into a depression. Then I met these guys, and I could sing again. Things happened very quickly."

The McCarter sisters grew up on Jones Cove Road and attended Bethel Baptist Church. "Jenny started playing the guitar, and it just came naturally to Teresa and me to sing harmonies," Lisa said. They sang in church and at revivals. "Everything started falling into place."

The sisters moved to Nashville in 1987. "We were scared to death," Lisa said. "We had never been around music business people. We would travel home to Sevierville every weekend."

The group found chart success with a family harmony sound like that of the Forester Sisters and the Whites. The McCarters were signed with Warner Bros. for five years and toured with country luminaries like Kenny Rogers. The sisters parted ways professionally in 1996, around the time Lisa's medical condition set in.

With Runaway Home, McCarter maintains a busy touring schedule, including, last May, a week in upstate New York.

"Me being from Sevier County, I didn't think people in New York would like our kind of music," she said. "But the places were packed. People gave us standing ovations. I was just blown away."

Coming up are dates in Georgia, Texas and Florida.

"I love being on the road and touring," McCarter said. "I love singing for people. That's what's been instilled in me since birth. If we can bless someone with our music, that's all that matters."

[kburns@themountainpress.com](mailto:kburns@themountainpress.com)