

Tennessee Heart – Shannon Bielski & Moonlight Drive

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There's always something to be said for music that possesses craft and creativity. Without those essential additives, there's little worth in listening. Given [Shannon Bielski's](#) background — fiddle lessons that began in her teens, a Public Performance Scholarship for the bluegrass program at [East Tennessee State University](#), a first place win for her ensemble, Moonlight Drive, at the 2018 Mid-Atlantic Bluegrass Band Competition, and a first place win in the Deer Creek Fiddler's Convention Songwriting Contest that same year — she certainly possesses the credence that should always ensure a quality contribution.

Indeed, her band — Kyle Windbeck on mandolin, guitar, and harmony vocals, Greg Muller on bass and harmonies, and Rob Benzig on banjo — have the means to guarantee that the quality quotient remains intact. However, to their credit, Bielski and company offer something that skill and savvy don't always provide — that is, an emotional connection that makes every song on their wonderful new album, [Tennessee Heart](#), a delight to hear. It's a feeling of connection and inclusion that thoroughly engages its listeners, while inviting them to share in the sentiments that the music tends to express. It's more than a matter of a robust performance — although there's certainly no shortage of those — but rather a sense of sincerity and commitment that finds the emotion to be a dominant factor throughout.

That quality is evident at the outset given the joyful title and a ringing delivery that's conveyed through feelings of exuberance and enthusiasm. *These Memories of You* is both sincere and celebratory, awash in sentiment and celebration, just as it was when The Trio first cut it. Her minor key rendition of *East Virginia* is a vivid vision of the place Bielski calls home, and though it references the folk classic, *Dark Hollow*, the upbeat and effusive motif offers a clear contrast to the imagery shared in that original rendition.

Other songs follow suit, from the easy stride of *Angelina Baker* to the sprightly instrumental, *Greenridge*, the rapid-fire revelry found in *Moonshiner* and *Tuscarora*, and on to the energetic outpouring of *Without Law*. Even the album's most winsome ballad, the tender *Loving You*, eschews any mournful melancholia that a slower song might entail.

Not surprisingly then, *Tennessee Heart* is a rewarding encounter overall, one that boasts equal parts prowess and positivity. It's an infectious enthusiasm, one that fully reflects Bielski and her band's sheer joy and jubilation.