

FLYING HIGH: ANCHOR & THE BUTTERFLY

The landscape around central Victoria inspires beautiful music, created by talented folk who embrace and absorb its mystery into their musical storytelling.

Writer: **Megan Spencer**

Photographer: **David Field**

Two such are Lance Hillier and Bridget Robertson. Coupled in music and life, their first album "Nothing To Win Nothing To Lose" is a lush, ethereal paean to the country: its history, the genre and hidden stories revealed within rolling hills and golden plains. Released in 2014, the lyrics might recall lost love and far away lands, but you can still hear the goldfields' blonde-bleached paddocks seeping through its sun-drenched pores.

While the songs are carefully structured and musically restrained, they also smoulder with the kind of intensity you'd find in classic Americana songs written by country and western veterans on the other side of the world. Produced over three years in their 'tin shed' of a home studio, the album gained glowing reviews in an enviable array of music publications.

Country Music Capital News called it "a fine example of modern Australian country-folk". It was No 4 on Americana Music Times "Best Albums of 2014 That No One Told You About" list, and the video for single "Lone Star" was featured on revered music blog Twang Nation.

They've gigged with the likes of Sal Kimba & The Rolling Wheel and have been interviewed all over the shop.

"We did a Skype interview with one guy overseas," laughs Bridget, not yet comfortable with all the attention. "It was weird!"

Born and bred in Kerang before moving to Bendigo to finish high school, Bridget now juggles family life with music and a busy day job as Goldfields Library Corporation community engagement and programs co-ordinator.

Learning guitar in Swan Hill with "country and western guy Rick", she says, "I never wanted to sing I just wanted to play guitar." Taking her formidable electric "axe" and amp in to her first lesson, Rick said, "If you want to play that, you're going to have to sing". Enter Elvis and Hank Williams.

"I wouldn't have sung otherwise," she

admits. "I still didn't sing in front of anyone for years."

Coupled with Lance's celestial guitar it is Bridget's timeless, whisper-tinged voice that lends such a distinct signature to Anchor And The Butterfly's sound. Her songwriting is equally impressive, recalling Americana/country greats Lucinda Williams, Gillian Welch and Alison Krauss. After playing with local folk-inspired outfits Violet Hands and The Wellsfords, she's finally surrendered.

"I've got lots of Steve Earle and EmmyLou Harris in my [music] collection. I always thought I was folk, but people kept saying to me, 'you're more country than you are folk'."

"I've embraced it now", she declares. "I

haven't had much choice: I'm from the country."

Born in WA, Lance spent his formative years as a youngster travelling around Australia with his family in a "36-foot bus". That is until dad Kevin famously discovered the Hand Of Faith gold nugget with a metal detector near Bridgewater in 1980. They stopped in Bendigo, laid down roots and at 17 Lance joined the army, later becoming a cartographer with the Department of Defence.

Music kept a-calling. It was in the army he started to play guitar seriously. "I took Mum's classical guitar with me," he grins. "I used to fingerpick Greensleeves".





"Megadeth, Joe Satriani, Metallica, Judas Priest..." he rattles off a rollcall of influences. "I just loved playing guitar and loved the journey through guitar styles... It took years."

Is their teenage daughter Sunday musical? "We jammed yesterday. I got her a guitar for Christmas," Lance smiles, just a little bit proud. "She loves music – she loves pop!"

Ever the musical traveller, Lance also has a producer's ear and temperament. More recently he's been exploring the role of sound engineer, working on projects with local artists the Cannanes, Mick Ahearn and The Red Cherries. He's just completed building a mobile recording studio.

"I hate the feeling of being stuck down in

one place," he explains of the cabin fever from spending long hours in the studio. "I want to be able to move gear to record in any place."

Referring to their sophomore album *Bridget* is busy writing in the new "writing room" he's recently renovated, Lance says "We're thinking of recording in an old hall or farmhouse next time."

Bridget adds, "there's a big story coming through." She's been immersing herself in stories of hardship in Depression-era Australia and America, "and about my grandparents' meeting".

"But the next record is heaps lighter and happier!" she laughs, acknowledging the

inherent irony and melancholic overtones of their first.

How's working together musically after 12 years as a couple?

"We don't agree all the time," Lance laughs with Bridget adding, "He pushes you – but it's great! I write better songs, and he's got great mood and atmosphere in his playing."

Lance thinks for a moment. "It's just so satisfying playing Bridget's songs," he says finally. "She's good at what she does. And to play with someone who's good at what they do brings great enjoyment."

The second *Anchor And The Butterfly* album is due out late 2015/early 2016. Visit anchorandthebutterfly.com ■