



Emily Nenni
Drive & Cry
Biography

Emily Nenni has a confession: she didn't always plan on being a performing artist. "I thought I was just going to be a songwriter," she admits. Clearly, life had something else in store. The singer and guitarist has emerged as one of the freshest and most electrifying voices in Nashville, with a sound rooted in classic honky-tonk and spiked with serious country, soul and rock 'n' roll fire, and sweet-and-sassy lyrics that chronicle hard living, hot nights, heartbreak and other universal truths about the human condition. Over the past several years she's enraptured audiences across Music City with sizzling sets in smoky bars and clubs, honing her command of the stage, perfecting her skills as a band leader and sharpening an already astute world view, all of which are on full display on her newest studio album, *Drive & Cry*.

The record is a marked departure from her previous full-length, 2022's celebrated *On the Ranch*. Whereas that effort saw Nenni uproot herself to lend a hand – and write – while assisting at a ranch in southern Colorado, *Drive & Cry* drops the listener smack in the middle of her boisterous and bustling Nashville world. The album kicks off with "Get to Know Ya," a honky-tonk rave-up that celebrates the end of the work day and the beginning of a music-filled, come-what-may night. Nenni busts out her biggest hoops, jumps into the jeans she can "really only stand up in," and heads to the local bar. "Play 'til the sun'll come / when the daylight's done," she sings as the instrumental accompaniment races in step behind her.

From there, Nenni leads into "Greatest Hits," a pedal-steel-inflected Dolly Parton-style number in which she tips her hat to underground honky-tonk venue Santa's Pub, a dive bar squeezed inside a double-wide trailer that has become her home-away-from-home in Nashville. "When I first came to town, I was 21 and singing at clubs with folks who were twice my age," Nenni recalls of moving to Music City from her native California. "Then a buddy of mine said, 'There's a place where people are making this music that are actually your age, and where you'd really fit in.' And that was Santa's Pub. It's where I learned that music doesn't have to be perfect – everybody is just having fun and there's no judgment. You can show up however you're feeling that night, have a good time and be surrounded by friends."

A stellar cast of those friends stepped up to assist Nenni on *Drive & Cry*, beginning with producer John James Tourville of New West labelmates the Deslondes. “He brought in half the musicians and I brought in half,” Nenni says. “And he gave me so much space to make the record that I wanted to make.”

It’s a record that is her most personal to date. Save for an album-closing cover of Terry Allen’s classic “Amarillo Highway” (a staple of her Sunday-night sets at Santa’s), Nenni penned the remainder of the dozen tracks entirely on her own. “It’s the first time I’ve done that,” she says. “I had a few weeks alone at my house in Nashville, and I just sat with all my thoughts and feelings from the last couple years and put it all down. So this is an album that’s truly ‘me.’ ”

The results put the full range of Nenni’s singular musical voice on display, from the soaring “Changes,” influenced by her love of Sixties girl groups, to the swampy, strutting empowerment anthem “I Don’t Have to Like You,” in which she declares “I’m a grown-ass woman and I don’t trust a word you coo.” There’s also the Tina Turner homage “I Don’t Need You” (“Got my own boots to fill and you know I will,” Nenni assures), the wistful, late-night honky-tonk ode “We Sure Could Two Step,” and the playful title track, in which, over a tight country-funk groove, Nenni jokes, “Don’t you worry ‘bout me / I’m gonna have a bawl.” It’s a lighthearted lyric, but one that is, like everything on the album, true to Nenni’s life. “I do actually cry a fair bit, and I love to do it while I’m driving,” she admits.

Nenni will have plenty of opportunities for that in the near future, as she plans to take *Drive & Cry* on tour, far and wide. “I love to be on the road,” she says. “I love to be with my buds, I love to play shows, and I love to make people happy and make people cry with my music. That’s what truly makes me happy, too.”

Nenni laughs. “So I maybe never thought I’d be a performer, but I sure am glad that I am.”