

Crises, as we know, often move us decisively forward.

“I will never record my own music again!” singer-songwriter Nora Sanger declared in 2022. The reason behind this vow is easy to explain: the artist, based in the Lüneburg Heath region of Germany, had discovered country music for herself in the late 2000s. Her first work in this genre, her debut album *Al-most Golden* (2015), was recorded in collaboration with pedal steel legend Nils Tuxen (Truck Stop, Texas Lightning, and others), resulting in an appealing collection of songs. However, Nora, who then was new to the game called music business and was thus totally inexperienced, unfortunately didn’t find the right supporters for her music. Instead, she talked to a number of music executives ignorant of the country genre. They all deemed her album „irrelevant“ and „uninteresting“ for the German market. True, Country, Americana, Roots Music - those genres are rather small niches in Germany. Who do have devoted fans, nevertheless. Something, Nora simply wasn’t aware of then.

Somewhat resigned, Nora went on to record a few singles in a genre that no longer resonated with her as a performer: pop. She soon realized what it meant to present something publicly that she didn’t truly stand behind.

Every music release requires an enormous investment of time, energy, and money—especially for an independent self-employed artist like Nora. Investing all that into a genre she didn’t identify with created a deep frustration. That’s why, in 2022, she said: “I will never record my own music again!”

“To lick my wounds and give myself something uplifting in that moment, I asked my former collaborator Nils Tuxen, as well as Eike Ernst (guitar) and Stefan Rebelski (keys)—whom I’ve been playing with since 2019—if they would rehearse a new song of mine together.” That song was called *Bonfires* and was, in its essence, a country singer-songwriter ballad. A song Nora already loved during the writing process—but one that once again sounded like something people might label as “irrelevant” and “uninteresting”.

“When Nils played the first steel line during the rehearsal, I felt like I was musically coming home. It was the moment when the first small doubt crept in about the vow I had made.”

For quite some time afterward, Nora reflected, weighed her options, and listened to her intuition. But the prospect of finally recording and sharing music that truly mattered to her—and even pairing it with her first little book—was so motivating that she decided to have *Bonfires* produced by Stefan Rebelski, featuring Nils Tuxen on pedal steel and Eike Ernst on electric guitar.

And... the book? *Bonfires*, a roughly 60-page novelette that expands on the song’s narrative, marks Nora’s debut as an author—a role she’s dreamed of since childhood, always imagining and writing stories.

“*Bonfires* showed me how important it is for me to express myself authentically through music—regardless of what others say. And it’s not like there’s nobody in Germany who likes Country, Americana & Co.—I just need to find the right listeners. Then the feedback sounds different,” Nora says with a wink. And so she decided that if she ever did return to recording music, she’d do it right.

“I grew up listening to Whitney Houston’s voice. Her albums thrilled me, but I loved a VHS tape of one of her concerts the most. I don’t know how many times I watched that recording. When she sang live, so much more gospel came through than on her records... and that gospel, that soul, the way she made and shaped music with her voice—that captivated me,” Nora recalls.

“When I discovered country music and recorded my album in 2015, I didn’t even think about adding soul to it. Somehow, I assumed that country and soul were two different worlds.”

But as she got to know more and more music from the Country realm and adjacent styles, she realized that was far from true.

“All of a sudden, I came across Chris Stapleton’s *Tennessee Whiskey*, Aaron Neville’s cover of *The Grand Tour*, or the Flying Burrito Brothers’ version of *Do Right Woman*—a song I originally knew from Aretha Franklin. I was amazed that the song worked just as well as a soul ballad and as a country waltz.”

Alongside the soul influence she wanted to incorporate into her new music, blues became the second theme that slowly made its way in—manifested in *Trail*, the title track of her new EP.

“I had written half of *Trail* back in 2013 and had the wild idea to bring the song into the sessions for *Almost Golden*. But I could already hear how *Trail* stood out stylistically from the songs we were working on at the time. Plus, I wanted an electric guitar to play a prominent role on *Trail*, and for the 2015 album, we had opted for a more folky, acoustic sound. I knew *Trail* wouldn’t really fit in, so I held it back—but it always stayed in my mind for ‘someday.’ When I decided to record a new EP — and with blues guitarist Eike Ernst as producer — I knew that the envisioned electric guitar tracks would be in good hands.”

When Nora first heard Eike’s arrangement for *Trail*, she was blown away: “This is blues rock!” she thought, surprised and totally thrilled.

“I could hardly believe I had co-written a song that turned into something so cool. And I was absolutely amazed by the collaboration with Eike, who—not just on *Trail*, but across the entire EP—brought so much stylistic authenticity, creativity, and elegant musical craftsmanship to the table.”

With the first single release from the EP, the pedal steel-heavy country rock track *Ride That Rodeo*, Nora picks up right where she left off with *Almost Golden* and *Bonfires*. The second single, *Tricky*, is a high-energy blues ballad that showcases Nora’s multifaceted vocals and Eike’s charismatic guitar playing. *The Dance* combines slow funk with slide guitar, and the EP’s closing track, *Phantom Pain*, is a country singer-songwriter piece distinguished by its soulful chorus vocals.

Nora’s lyrics center around personal, female, and artistic empowerment—which is no surprise, given that *Trail* is clearly a statement of her musical authenticity.

“The great arrangements and instrumental finesse on *Trail* inspired me to take a step that would have made sense even back in the *Almost Golden* days,” Nora says. “I want to put more spotlight on my live band moving forward, and I’ll be performing with these amazing musicians under the name *Nora Sanger & Still Waters*.”

The chapter *Trail* is a mix of back to the roots and fresh start for Nora Sanger—and she can’t wait to step into this new chapter.