Published on *International Bluegrass Music Association* (https://ibma.org)

The Doctor Will See You Now: A Ralph Stanley Prescription [1]

By Bill Conger

Take 14 cuts of Ralph Stanley songs and call in the morning. Actually, you won't need to do that because anything ailing you will be cured by the soulful sounds of the octogenarian bluegrass figure. The legendary veteran prescribed a heavy dose of medicinal music for Don Rigsby's new CD, *Doctor's Orders*: *A Tribute to Ralph Stanley* on Rebel Records.

"He loved it," Rigsby told IBMA. "In fact, the reason it's called *Doctor's Orders* is he and I sat down and chose the songs. I met him in Lexington, KY, and I had a list of about 50 tunes that I liked, and I wanted him to sit down and listen to the titles with me and get his take on them."

The two-time Grammy nominee wanted to record his idol's songs from Stanley's years after his brother Carter passed away.

"The kind of input he had was like remembering little tidbits about where they recorded them and who was in the band at that time, which was really important ... and why he chose them at the time," Rigsby said.

"I intentionally tried to play the music and sing the songs just like the old records," Rigsby added. "I didn't want to improve on them because I didn't see any way that I could. I really tried to pay homage to that [original sound]."

"I?m so proud of the tribute record that Don Rigsby has done for me,? says Stanley. ?He has recorded some of my favorite material and brought new life to each song.?

For example, Stanley originally recorded the tune "Brand New Tennessee Waltz," at the

urging of label founder Dick Freeland.

"He wanted him to do something a little different to try to appeal to more people," Rigsby explained. "I've loved that song from the first time I ever heard him sing it. I was going to get Ricky Skaggs to sing on it because he played twin fiddles on the first version. Ricky wouldn't do it because he said he hated it," Rigsby says with a chuckle. "He hated that song the first time they did it, and he still hates it. So, he chose to do some other things and did them well."

"Home in the Mountains" was a special treat for Rigsby that stirred his soul in the studio.

"He [Ralph] did something for me that he doesn't do much these days," Rigsby said. "He sang tenor with me on a song with Ricky Skaggs singing baritone. It was really emotional for me because my two biggest musical influences are no doubt Ralph and Ricky. To get to be in the middle of them two singing is pretty awesome. Another cool part about that one is that was recorded in 1976 and Keith Whitley, from my hometown, was the one who sang that on the original recording. So, I got to connect all the dots there."

Besides Stanley and Skaggs, Larry Sparks, Charlie Sizemore, Steve Sparkman, and James Alan Shelton, Ron Stewart and Barry Bales guest starred on the album. The one original tune and the first single from the CD is "Mountain Doctor," which Rigsby co-wrote with Larry Cordle.

During Rigsby's career, he has performed and/or recorded with The Bluegrass Cardinals, J. D. Crowe & The New South, Lonesome River Band, Longview and his current band, Midnight Call. He won two IBMA awards for producing Larry Sparks' comeback album, *40*. Rigsby was the first full-time director of Morehead State University's Kentucky Center for Traditional Music. All the roads to his musical success began at the Paramount Theatre in Ashland, KY on the day of his sixth birthday. Rigsby's parents surprised him with tickets to see Stanley and the Clinch Mountain Boys in concert.

"I had already become dyed-in-the-wool enthralled with Stanley music and Ralph," Rigsby remembers.

His dad snuck in a private conversation with Whitley, who had just become Stanley's lead singer.

"Keith Whitley came out into the crowd, bent down and said, 'Is this the young man that wants to meet Ralph Stanley?' I just kind of shook my head yes, because I was in awe. He picked me up, put me on his shoulders and carried me backstage, and there was Ralph sitting. He looked larger than life to me. He talked to me. He was so nice to me, and that night sang songs for me. Ever since that day, he never forgot who I was."

Not only has Stanley been Rigsby's biggest musical influence, but he has also become a trusted friend. Rigsby had always wanted to record an album of music in honor of the music icon, and he didn't want to wait until it was too late.

" I just thought I could do this after he's passed away, but he'd never know that I did, and I really wanted to show him so that he could see how important that he is to me," Rigsby said. "I wanted to get a chance to spread his wonderful style of music. I'm not talking about the *O, Brother Where Art Thou?* era even though that's good; I'm talking about the stuff that he recorded without the input of T. Bone Burnett and all the other people that came along and

influenced what he was doing. I wanted it to be about the things he heard and did. That's why I did it."

Source URL: https://ibma.org/press/archives/doctor-will-see-you-now-ralph-stanley-prescription

Links:
[1] https://ibma.org/press/archives/doctor-will-see-you-now-ralph-stanley-prescription