

## Review: Years of dues led Carolina Story to stellar debut

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Carolina Story, "Lay Your Head Down" (Black River Americana)

Ben Roberts comes from Arkansas, his wife Emily is from South Dakota, and they met in Memphis a decade ago. But Nashville was always their destiny.

The couple's debut album, "Lay Your Head Down," pulsates with achy, heartfelt sentiment, delivered in tender harmony against a warmly pastoral background.

For nearly 10 years, the duo said yes to every gig request, performing in nursing homes, churches and bars. The response was encouraging, but success was not immediate.

Still, talent this big is hard to keep down. Several odd jobs and two babies later, it landed them a record deal.

On the opening title cut, a mournful train whistle of a harmonica lays the groundwork for Ben plaintive tenor.

"Springtime came with a vengeance this year, the river rose high, the water ain't clear," he sings in words composed on the banks of the Cumberland River.

But it isn't until Emily adds harmony on the second verse that the voltage of their voices joined together takes command.

It's possible, maybe even probable, that these gentle songs won't rise to the top of the country charts. But they will find their way onto many a mellow playlist. And if they had emerged under the names of, say, Tim McGraw and Faith Hill, surely Nashville would have dropped to its knees.

The thing is, this isn't the kind of music that's written with stardom in mind. These songs feel like they had to come out.