

20 questions

Interview by Richard Perez Photography by Steve Raymer

for Krista Detor



Krista in her home studio.

A World-Class Talent in Our Town

If you have never seen Krista Detor perform or heard one of her brilliantly composed songs, you are missing something. ¶ Although she has achieved only a modicum of fame in this country, those who know and appreciate the best of modern music know Krista Detor. Her lyrics and compositions are often compared to those of Leonard Cohen, Tom Waits, and Joni Mitchell. She defies genre. Her voice is unique. Her album *Mudshow* was praised by *Rolling Stone* magazine as “a small miracle—intense and wonderful” and reached #1 on the Euro-Americana chart. Detor is better known in Great Britain, Germany, and the Netherlands than she is in America.

In Bloomington, her home, Detor, 41, is part of an outstanding group of singer/songwriters that includes Carrie Newcomer, Tim Grimm, Tom Roznowski, and Michael White. In 2007, the five collaborated on a stage show, *Wilderness Plots*, based on the book by local author Scott Russell Sanders. A resounding success, the show continues to tour throughout the country.

An artist with a strong commitment to our community and social consciousness, Detor recently sat down with interviewer Richard Perez, artistic director of Bloomington Playwrights Project, to answer 20 questions for *Bloom* readers.

BLOOM: When we first met it was 2002, and we were both servers at the Uptown Café. I heard a CD you had sung vocals on for a rock-and-roll band called Wolfpack. It was very different from the stuff you do now. And yet when I heard it, I thought, “This is a major talent.” Tell us about that time in your life.

DETOR: I was a caterer at the university when I first came to Bloomington, and there were some really lovely guys who worked in maintenance. They had a band called Wolfpack. I had just come into town and it had been awhile since I had been out performing. But I had all these songs—I had never stopped writing. The guys said, “Hey, we’ve got this band and we’re going out to this studio called Airtime, and I heard you can sing and you’ve got some songs.” And I said, “Well, yeah, I do.” So, I became “Timberwolf” and I wore a platinum-blond wig for the whole session. I was somebody else entirely because I wasn’t sure I wanted that to be my introduction to Bloomington.

BLOOM: You were born in Burbank, California. How did growing up in Southern California influence you as an artist?

DETOR: My childhood was largely influenced by musical theater because my mother had season tickets to all of the big houses—the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion and the Mark Taper Forum, the Hollywood Bowl, and the Ahmanson. I went to all the big rock shows as I was growing up. It influenced me a lot.

BLOOM: Do you remember your own first musical experience, when you started to play?

DETOR: Yes. I remember this awakening moment at my babysitter’s house—I must have been five or six—and she had one of those organs with the colored, numbered dots on the keys and the book with the matching colored, numbered dots that I played enough that she was begging me to stop. I remember feeling

Carrie [Newcomer] said, “Come on the road with me,” which was a gigantic risk for her. She changed my life.

a connection to that instrument at the time. So when I was seven, we moved into a house that had an old beat-up piano. A bunch of the ivories were missing and it had this horrible white antique paint all over it, but my mother asked the people who moved out of the house to let us keep it because I’d asked her if I could take piano lessons.

BLOOM: So you started taking lessons at seven. At that point, did you know music is what you wanted to do for the rest of your life?

DETOR: Around seven or eight, I found myself singing harmonies to the radio. I remember being in the back seat, with my aunt driving, and I was singing quietly to myself and her looking over at my older cousin, and saying, “Who is that singing?” My cousin said my name, and I remember my aunt saying “Huh?” She didn’t say anything more, but my ears perked up, and I thought, “I wonder if I can actually sing?” I started realizing that music meant something to me.

BLOOM: It meant enough to you that you continued to work at it.

DETOR: The kick-over point was at about ten, when my piano teacher realized I wanted to sing what was on the radio, so she introduced me to the idea of sheet music. I started walking down to the little music store that was about half a mile away, and saving up my quarters

and buying sheet music so I could play it and sing it. That’s really how I learned to read music—by having to do it. I did that with her for a couple of years. Then my parents were pretty well convinced that I could read and that they didn’t need to fork out the seven bucks a half hour for the piano teacher. My father chimed in, “I could use the money on the horses. You can read the damn music. I’ll take my seven bucks a week back.”

BLOOM: So your teacher was smart enough to tap another one of your talents in order to get you to stay committed to your piano playing. Did your mother also encourage you to stick with it?

DETOR: Yeah, when I was about nine I wanted to quit. My mother said, “No, you’re not quitting.” I’ve been grateful for that. It could have been a decisive moment for me, because I could have given it up. But she said, “I put too much money into this. You’re not giving it up! I put too much money into your brother’s braces and he’s not taking them off, and you’re going to keep playing that damn piano!”

BLOOM: Were others in your family musically inclined?

DETOR: I was adopted, so no one in my adopted family is musical, including my cousins.

BLOOM: So by the time you get to high school you’re a pretty proficient singer and piano player. How did your talent affect those years?

DETOR: I played in a rock band and sang at all the big dances. You know, the big sappy love songs you sing in high school. At that point I was sure that’s what I wanted to do.

I was also entering talent shows, and at one show there was a man in the audience who sort of discovered me. He took me onto the L.A. performance circuit—the wedding-bar



Krista and brother Rob as toddlers.

wanted to get back to Korea ever since. It was one of the great experiences of my life to be outside of my own culture.

BLOOM: A couple of years go by, and something life-changing happens. Tell us about that.

DETOR: My husband and I were living in Portland, Oregon, with our two-year-old daughter, Aurora. He had just graduated from culinary school when my biological parents hired a private investigator and found us. When they called me on the phone, one of my very first questions was, “Who’s musical in the family, who plays piano?” My biological mother said, “We all do. Your grandfather on one side and your grandmother on the other side had beautiful voices, and your great-grandfather was a luthier. He made mandolins and cellos and violins.”

My biological father’s very persuasive, so he e-mailed me, and said, “Why don’t you come and live near us in the Florida Keys? Your husband can cook in some great restaurant and you can work part time for the same money you’re making full time.” So, within a month of them finding me, we moved to Florida.

My husband had dealt with some issues and was doing really well when we were in Portland. But when we moved to Florida, he started to struggle. My biological father was intent on keeping me there because he was enjoying getting to know us, so he said, “Let’s all invest in a restaurant.” We rented a place, and we started the conversion. Then along came Hurricane George. It hit the Florida Keys, I think it was ’98, and literally knocked the roof off the restaurant. Fortunately, we got a big insurance check and we fixed it—got the restaurant ready to go—and quite literally the day we were going to open, my husband said, “I can’t do this.” He was in a much worse place than I wanted to acknowledge. He packed up and left—left us all standing there. He’s doing amazingly well now, re-married in New York—but that was a dark time for me. And for him I imagine.

We had so much money in the restaurant. We had maxed out all of our credit cards and all of my father’s money. We had gone so far out on a limb, so we opened the restaurant and I cooked for two years. I worked many, many hours, and the stories out of that restaurant could take up a book.

BLOOM: So how did you end up in Bloomington?

DETOR: I did the restaurant for as long as I could. But then my daughter became school-

mitzvah-cocktail circuit. Very high-paying. I would show up with charts and play with L.A. studio musicians. They’d play and I’d sing. I was on that circuit almost every weekend. I was seventeen pretending to be twenty-one.

Geffen Records came and saw me play, and people were expressing interest. But by the time I was eighteen, I was fairly rebellious. I probably threw away some pretty sizable opportunities in my adolescent rebellion, but I wasn’t interested and I wasn’t ready. So when I first went to college I studied classical history and Meso-American history. I studied the Aztecs and the Maya for two years. I dropped out for two years, and then I went back into music.

BLOOM: You were married by this time, correct?

DETOR: Yes, I met my first husband George when we were the leads in *The Sound of Music* in high school. We were friends for about seven years. And then I don’t know what happened, but we both got all starry-eyed one day, and he said, “Let’s get married!” He was in the military—he was going to be a world traveler—and I said, “Okay!” When I graduated with my degree in piano performance from Cal State, we went to South Korea. I became the musical director on the Army base at Yongsan.

I directed colonels and lieutenant colonels and Air Force pilots and God knows who in renditions of *South Pacific* and *Man of La Mancha*. We were there for about a year, and I have

Krista Detor Lyrics from her holiday album *The Silver Wood*
SHERIFF SANTA FROM MONTANA

Somewhere in Montana there’s a Santa with a gun
And his elves on wooden horses having tons of cowboy fun
And the bad guys all go runnin when he shakes his jolly fist
Cause somewhere in Montana, Sheriff Santa has got a list

The jail’s made out of gingerbread and icing window grout
And Spitball Sonny done lost his teeth trying to eat his bad way out
The jailer’s small but mighty mean as he cracks his licorice whip
And somewhere in Montana, Sheriff Santa shoots from the hip

His pistol’s filled with lumps of coal, he’s got a perfect aim
And all the bad guys tremble just to hear Kris Kringle’s name
And high noon’s pretty frosty as the reindeer whinny and neigh
Somewhere in Montana a bad guy is gonna pay

On Xmas eve he calls his yuletide posse
To round up all the bad guys that are naughty
There’s Talkback Tommy and Dee+Dan
there’s Gumchair Gus And Tattletale Stan
Sheriff Santa’s got a plan cause they’re hiding out in Candyland

Santa calls out to the bad guys, “put your hands up in the air”
And they beg him, “please! No! not the list!” But the list’s already there
And he checks their names off one by one—Shoots their stockings full of coal
Cause out there in Montana being naughty takes its toll (pause)

So saddle up, little deputies, and think hard on this tale
Don’t let yourselves get locked up in that old gingerbread jail
Cause being naughty might be fun, but just remember this
Somewhere in Montana Sheriff Santa has got a list...



Krista’s first piano—who knew?
Courtesy photo

age, and my [adoptive] mother moved back here after she retired. This is her hometown and I had spent every other summer of my childhood here, and now all of my family was here.

I also realized the amazing child-oriented community and school system here—I did some research on Bloomington schools and everything that was available to me. Between the school system, a great community, and all of my family, the move was a no-brainer.

BLOOM: In your career you have had a knack for being in the right place at the right time. Along with talent, timing seems to be so crucial when talking about your success.

DETOR: I have been lucky. Yes, it’s been like that—right place, right time—all along the way.

BLOOM: After we met working at the Uptown and you were singing with Wolfpack, I asked you to do a cabaret. Why did you agree?

DETOR: It was the right place, right time. I had no good reason to say yes. Why in the world would I think I could do that when I couldn’t even get onstage and play a song at that point? I had stopped performing. A certain kind of paralytic stage fright had set in. So why did I respond yes to you? I have no idea.

BLOOM: So how did you get over your stage fright?

DETOR: I was living in my mother’s basement, and I decided I would at least commit to record the songs I had written. I decided I was just going to put some songs on a CD.

Dave Weber produced it, and after I recorded a couple of my songs he looked at me, and said, “There are people in this town who should know you are here. Do you have more songs?” I said yes, and he said, “I think we should talk about doing an album.” I said, “Great.” Well, I didn’t have the money and he didn’t have the time, and in the interim I was still working tables at the Uptown.

Then I brought the Wolfpack CD into the Uptown for fun. They put it on the stereo system and you heard it. We had become friends, and you looked up and said, “Wow, so you’re a musician....You know what? I’m the interim director of the Bloomington Playwrights Project, and we’re doing a cabaret project. You should do a cabaret.” I remember thinking, “Yeah, right, whatever. Okay, get me a Cabernet.” But then

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we would like to take a moment to give thanks for the many blessings bestowed upon this community.

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Teenage Krista on the wedding-bar mitzvah circuit. Courtesy photo

you said it again the following week. I have absolutely no idea why, but I said "Okay." And then it occurred to me, this would be a good time to finish the CD. Why not incorporate my own songs into the cabaret and have a CD to sell. So it started two things in motion at once—getting back onstage and doing my very

CHRISTMAS IN LONDON

Sleigh bells may ring The tree may light Carolers may sing, "Oh holy night!" Oh holy eve where angels be But I won't leave until you sing to me	The Merry Day Good will and cheer And I will stay Until you tell me, dear
Turtledoves may fly As true love tells Carolers may cry, "Sweet silver bells!" Sweet silver wood of Christmas pine And stay I could Until you are mine	The wind may blow The fire burn down Carolers may go back to the town To love and home As here am I And I'll never roam Til you say goodbye
The snow may fall and melt again Carolers may call, "Ye Merry Men!"	Sleigh bells may ring The tree may light Carolers may sing, "Oh holy night!" Oh holy eve where angels be But I won't leave until you sing to me

first CD. And it sounds so ridiculously cliché, but it was a life-changing event, and my stage fright after that was gone.

BLOOM: *And that CD became...?*

DETOR: *A Dream in a Cornfield.*

BLOOM: *The collaboration on that album solidified your professional relationship with David Weber. You continued working together professionally, eventually became romantically involved, and are married today. Talk about that relationship.*

DETOR: Well, timing again. We started working on this album and became very good friends. After that we started writing together. His influences were completely different than mine, but the writing cemented our friendship. Circumstances were complex, you know. It was another timing issue. All the windows and doors opened up and we ended up together. And that's where we are now.

BLOOM: *That relationship also produced a huge turning point in your career: your second album, Mudshow. Tell us about the genesis of that CD.*

DETOR: I woke up one morning and had this image in my mind, and I went downstairs and wrote a song called "Buffalo Bill." I looked up, and said, "You know what? I'm going to write an album. I'm going to write ten songs in seven days."

I wrote it based on my impressions of the Indiana landscape and the idea of what might be seen in the characters of a small circus moving through town. This idea of character study was fascinating, and it was the first time that I had conceived of really writing outside of myself, writing from someone else's perspective.

I gave it to Carrie Newcomer [renowned Bloomington recording artist]. She called me, and said, "You know, we need to do something with this." Later Carrie said, "Come on the road with me," which was a gigantic risk for her. She changed my life. She took me out into the real world of the music scene—to every one of the clubs, introducing me to all of the club owners, all the DJs—and selflessly said, "You should meet this person. You should hear her music." I went all over the country with her, and within two-and-a-half months I had a record deal in Europe.

BLOOM: *Again, right place, right time.*

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Krista with husband David Weber and daughter Aurora.

DETOR: Yeah, it's actually really wonderful. Take the writers group I'm in with Carrie, Tim Grimm, Tom Roznowski, Michael White, and Malcolm Dalglish. Every one of them has national recognition. Not to mention all the other unbelievably talented local writers and players. It's an immense pool of inspiration and collaboration. Why the heck would I leave?

BLOOM: *Something that really resonates in your work is the wonderful literary quality in your words. Are you influenced by literature, and, if so, who are some of the writers?*

DETOR: I'm influenced most definitely by literature, my most predominate influence being the poets. When I was younger my big influences were Yeats, Sylvia Plath, and later Dorothy Parker, Bob Kaufman, Lorca, and Neruda. Also the Latin-American surrealists—Gabriel García Márquez and Allende—with that kind of vivid visual imagery.

BLOOM: *Well, this has been fun. Is there anything you would like to leave our readers with?*

DETOR: In addition to the talent and art support in this town, there is an immensely wonderful support of the world at large. I did a

DETOR: Right place, right time. And there was Carrie.

BLOOM: *It is an understatement to say your life has changed dramatically in the last few years. What keeps you in Bloomington?*

DETOR: Somebody said this to me: If you take Bloomington as a dot, and you get a piece

of string and you go just a five-hour radius from that point, 360 degrees, you've covered all these huge cities. The touring possibilities for me within ten hours include DC, Atlanta, and Memphis. Within 12 hours I've got Philadelphia, Birmingham, and New York.

BLOOM: *Not to mention that there is an amazing support system here.*

benefit for Indiana Friends of Nyaka, a school for AIDS orphans in Uganda, and *Bloom Magazine* is going to support me in another benefit for Nyaka and another charity, Giving Back to Africa, which supports an orphanage and scholarship program in Congo.

The sense of community and world support that comes out of Bloomington, the incredible service and action organizations—this place represents a community of people who are tuned into trying to make the world a better place. And I feel, for the first time, that I can make a difference. I'm glad to be part of Bloomington and be in the middle of all of this. I wouldn't be anywhere else but here. ✨

ONE TOO MANY XMASSES

One too many minutes on the clock there on the wall
There are one too many minutes waiting for someone to call
And I have one too many Christmases
With nothing much at all
And I have you. But we are through

One too many tv shows that start and end with cars
There are one too many telephones from one too many bars
And I have one too many photographs
Of things you said were ours
And I have you, But we are through

So take your one too many I love yous
And one too many honeydos
And your favorite Christmas poster of the girls who sell the beer
Take your light-up Rudolph Reindeer nose and your Dukes of Hazzard videos
And take your Yuletide ass right out of here

One too many bill collectors calling me on Sunday
There are one too many lists of all the things you'll do on Monday
And I have one too many charges made to 1-900, honey
Yeah, I have you. But we are through

So take your one too many I love yous
And one too many

honeydos
And your favorite Christmas poster of the girls who sell the beer
And take your Santa Underwear
That barely fits your derriere
And take your Yuletide ass right out of here

Maybe you had one too many. That might explain it, goodness knows
Yeah maybe you had one too many slipped on the ice and broke your nose
And couldn't buy my Christmas present cause all the liquor stores were clo--ho ho hosed...

There've been one too many fabrications one too many lost vacations
One too many holidays, one too many lonely celebrations
One too many IOUs for future presents I could choose
At one too many hardware stores, got nothing but the Christmas Blues

I'd settle for about any guy who'd keep a job and not ask why
Who'd show up more than once a week to get his laundry done
I'd settle for about any man who'd mow the lawn and lend a hand
and fill my Christmas stocking right instead of leaving me with none

take your drunken mistletoes and your anniversary garden hose
and take your yuletide ass right out of here.



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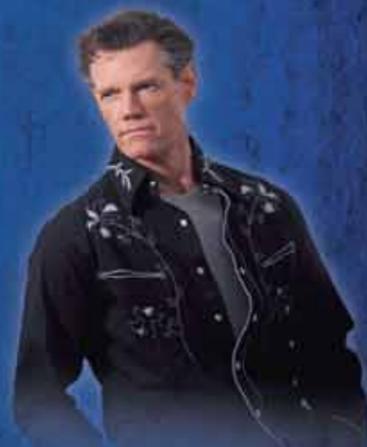
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