

A Conversation with Suzy Bogguss
by Frank Goodman (12/2007, puremusic.com)

What a singer. When, only now and then, a singer's basic sound is completely arresting, it's like a wake up call. You can have attitude, you can be dramatic, elastic or gymnastic--but when you have that *sound*, you can just sing, and it's all there. You can dial in degrees of whatever else you want, but that's just icing on the cake. And it's the cake they call angel's or devil's food, right?

A dozen or so albums into a charmed career, Suzy says she's just realizing she's actually the thread that ties it all together, not whether she's singing Country, or Swing, or Jazzy Pop. And the last of those is the place where *Sweet Danger* goes with assured poise. Though most of her fantastic work has been in the Country vein, her fans followed her when she cut the landmark *Swing* record with her old friend Ray Benson and past and present members of Asleep At The Wheel. It's a cinch that they will be along for the ride here to witness Suzy absolutely killing the great Beth Nielsen Chapman and Annie Roboff song "Right Back Into The Feeling," or the mindblowing cover of the Peter Cetera classic "If You Leave Me Now." Sometimes you don't really get how great a singer is until they come out of the bag that made them famous.

We said jazzy pop, but at times it feels also like a really great soft rock album. (Considering that the record by younger counterparts The Silver Seas, in this issue struck, us similarly, we see, perhaps, a very welcome pattern.) That her soft rock CD has a jazzier feel might well have something to do with the experience and pedigree of her players, and a different range of influences. Whatever it is, it works for me. Instead of Billy Joel or The Beach Boys, there are moments on *Sweet Danger* that certainly bring Steely Dan or Stevie Wonder to mind.

But none of those groups had a voice like this. And it's the singer that drives the music deep into your heart or your soul, and that gives the lyrics wings. And Suzy Bogguss does that, all of that. What a woman.

Puremusic: I love your new CD, *Sweet Danger*. It's a great piece of work.

Suzy Bogguss: Well, thank you so much. I'm really having a lot of fun with it. I've just been touring it for the last month, and having a blast playing the music. It's such a change from my last project that it's been one of those things where the band, we all kind of had to take on a little different attitude for it. Because we've been doing the swing music that's very upbeat and really happy, and lots of solos. And then this is like much more of a groove kind of thing.

PM: Oh, yeah.

SB: And so there's the whole kind of shifting into *hey, we used to be like jazzing out on our swing album, but now we're trying to be real cool cats*. [laughs]

PM: Yeah. And I think the transition is well made. I thought the disclaimer sticker on the front was very interesting: "Warning, this music is not what you expect, listen with an open mind."

SB: That was actually sort of a joke when I started it out, but it ended up piquing the publicist's and my husband's imagination. They thought, well, what would it be like if you actually got a disclaimer sticker on it? I was sort of joking. I was over in England playing, and I just said, "Why don't you put a sticker on that to make sure that people give it a couple of listens before they decide what it is." Because it's not really an easy mark for--it certainly doesn't strike you as, *oh, boy, this is the most country record she ever made.*

PM: And as hard as it is to get somebody's attention in our culture, one thing that for some reason or another does get people's attention is a sticker on the front of something, and any kind of disclaimer.

SB: Yeah, that's kind of true. It's crazy, isn't it? But when you think about how much noise is out there, I can so understand it, because as a consumer, and as a person who gets inundated with news and such myself, there's many places that I've learned to tune out, I just can't hear that anymore.

PM: Yeah, or otherwise your ears would just collapse.

SB: Yeah. You'd have to be the ultimate ADD, I guess, just to be able to--like my child can do three things at once and just be absolutely as happy as a clam. But I didn't grow up that way, so...

PM: Coming off a long country career, and then the swing album, and this, *Sweet Danger*--what do we call it? It's kind of a jazzy pop record, is it not?

SB: I think I've always had an underlying pop sense to my voice. I'm from Illinois, so it's not a real strong southern accent, and I certainly don't have any of the serious twang. And so much of my music has just been a collage of different influences over the years, that so much of it really has been sort of an evolution for me. Because when I first moved to Nashville, I made the *Somewhere Between* album, and it was all cowboy swing, and very acoustic and that stuff because that is where I had just come from; I'd just spent five years in a camper truck playing cowboy music in Montana and Wyoming, and taking that around to the folk clubs.

And then after that, *Aces* got a little bit more sophisticated because I got to experiment with these fabulous musicians in Nashville. And the more power that [Jimmy] Bowen gave me, and more giving me the reins as a producer, the more I got to play with that stuff. So the next few albums I just stretched out along with these great players to sort of make the country music, but still having a lot of different influences that were affecting me and that were things that I was listening to at the time. The song "Eat At Joe's," which

was the Matraca Berg and Gary Harrison song that had my back on the record right after *Aces*, was the beginning of the swing album. I started performing that song live, and people went crazy for it. Even though that was the time period when "Letting Go" and "Aces" and "Cinderella" were out, here was a piece that was just really different and unique and it really shone. It was a lot of fun for me to sing that style.

So later on, that was what I pulled on to get the materials ready to give to Ray Benson, and then said, "You know how to do this thing. So pull my bluesy jazz singer out of me." And he did. Now that's kind of what I did with Jason. When I went to New York, he and I were just having dinner, and I just kind of blurted out that I didn't know what the next record was going to be, and what was he doing. And it was again, just almost sort of a joke, here's a guy who played with Miles Davis, and then producing tracks with Sting and Chaka Khan and all these people. And he's always been like a good friend to me, much more than--musically we've always admired each other's work, but it's never really been like, "What would happen if we collaborated?" So it's almost like when you have a friend, and then one night you're out, and you have a glass of wine, and you go, "What would happen if we fell in love with each other?" It's that night where you just kind of go, "Jeez, we've been friends for a really long time..." It was like a *When Harry Met Sally* kind of vibe. That was kind of how it was. It was like, "what if we put the chocolate and the peanut butter together?"

[laughter]

SB: "What would it taste like, I wonder?" And so that's what we came out with, was *Sweet Danger*.

PM: Wow.

So for people who call you country or swing, instead of just a great singer, they might have to switch gears a little bit for *Sweet Danger*, but good for them. I mean, if some people don't have a gear like that, well, they can listen to "Letting Go" or whatever. But I think this is as good as anything you've ever done. I mean, you sound as at home here as in any of your records.

SB: Well, I think I am as at home as I could ever be. My first reference, as far as playing guitar and making music, was Carol King and James Taylor, and bits of John Denver thrown in there. So that was my here's-how-I-accompany-myself learning. And then my first band experiences were with country bands, because I was in Illinois, and there was not much else going on. And I certainly didn't have any kind of--at that point I didn't have any aspirations to sing Led Zeppelin. [laughs]

PM: Right.

SB: The mentors to us at that time were singer/songwriters like Elton John and James Taylor. And as far as the girl singers, there were a few that were rocking the world, like Bonnie Raitt and people like that. We had Linda Ronstadt and we had Emmy, and we had

people who really had pretty diverse choices in songs. If you were into Linda Ronstadt back then, I mean, people called her a country singer, too. And she reached a point where she almost had to get mad about it and say, "I'm not a country singer!"

PM: I'm just a singer.

SB: "I'm a singer, and I choose these songs to sing for whatever reason."

And that's a really difficult thing for me. Like I kind of had one of those little revelations. I was sitting at a campfire with Robert Earl Keen, because our kids are real good friends, and they ski together. And we were sitting outside at his ranch just talking about stuff. And I was telling him about the swing album, because this was back when I was making the swing album. And I said, "I'm nervous about what my fans are going to say, because I care what they say. I care what they think, and I don't want to alienate them, and I don't want them to think I'm turning my back on my past and all the great things that have happened to me because of my major label deal, and things like that." And he just was so pooh-pooh on it, he was like, "Oh, my God, what in the world are you whining about? You're a great singer, you could sing whatever you want to sing. Just believe that that's enough thread for your fans. They love your voice, they love to hear you sing."

And it was like I took a breath of water, and I found out that I could actually get oxygen out of it when he said that. I just kind of went, "Oh, my God, really? So I'm the thread. I get it."

PM: Yeah, I'm my own thread.

SB: And it was just like one of those moments where you just go, "I get it." Just that voice that once in a while somebody actually gets through to your hard head, Suzy. And this one actually got through. And then it just didn't matter.

For this record, I chose material that really was something I could get behind, and that I felt I could be honest with, and knew it'd be okay, things would work their way out. And so far I have just been thrilled with the response. The live audiences have just been thrilling me to death with their response--because a lot of times in a live situation you have to warm people up to a new song that they haven't heard before, but I just get a feeling from them that there's warmth in it already for them. It's like they are already a little warm and fuzzy to the tunes before they've even heard them. And so they give a good response on the first listen, and that's just been the coolest feeling for me.

PM: How about radio? Will you guys work it in a jazz radio format, or a light rock radio format?

SB: Well, this is our own label thing. This is the first time we've done it completely ourselves. And we just figured, as far as the funding of these kinds of things, that it didn't really make much sense to us to try to be a big record label. My hope is that this can kind of grow virally, like person-to-person. And I've been really encouraging my fans to tell

their friends and to let them hear things--not in a nuisance way, like, "Oh, my God, sit in my car and listen to this," or anything. But that it be something that naturally they can kind of advocate and say, "I heard something really great, you should hear it." And I'm just hoping that that will click somewhere, and I'll get that kind of encouragement that it would make sense to invest. But for me to just like coldly throw money at radio, it doesn't really make any sense to me.

PM: Yeah, I hear that. And I understand from our friend Kissy Black that you actually built up and maintained a good presence on the web and in cyberspace, and that there is an outreach, alternatively, in that direction.

SB: Yes, and I really see that helping. It's been kind of wild for me because I started out back in the day when we actually did mailing lists. And we had co-ops between performers, way back when I was following Nanci Griffith, and Michael Johnson, and people like this. And we had a little co-op up in the Midwest. And each performer had to put a little bit into the notebook. Okay? So you gave them like three places that you could play across the country, one of your favorite places, and all the details that went with it, like what kind of sound system do they have, how much do they charge at the door--just all the little deals. Do they feed you? All this stuff. Some of them were even house concerts. And then I would sit down and I would book myself out there. Then I would sit down and I'd write 200 postcards, "I'm going to be back in Yellowstone Park. I don't know if you're going to be there when I'm there, but it just so happens that I'll be playing at the same place that you saw me last time," and la, la, la.

PM: Wow.

SB: And now I can do that one time and send it to thousands of people! And that's just a fabulous concept to me, because I saw it work back when I was developing a following, when I was in my camper. So it's kind of cool to see the ultimate version of that, taking that idea to the nth degree.

PM: Right. Instead of writing 200 postcards, you're doing an e-mail blast to thousands of people. Yeah, technology has its upside, for sure.

SB: Exactly. I actually see it as such a positive thing for someone like myself who has had some--whatever the status is out there, but--some people to get a base following. So it's been hard for me because I let too much time pass. And that has been frustrating for me because I wish that I would've had the foresight to realize that I needed to jump into this a long time ago.

PM: Yeah. Who knew that big label business as we knew it would start to go away so fast and so suddenly.

SB: It went really quick. It went really quick. And I was very busy with raising a child, too. Plus a lot of crazy things like losing my fan club list in a dead computer--

PM: Ouch.

SB: --and things like that, little things that you just would see as monumental--but I've found some of those people again through the Myspace pages, because they write actual messages and tell me where we saw each other, where did I meet you, and this kind of stuff. And again, having started out in the way where I sign autographs after shows, and I talk to my audience, and I have much more accessibility than I had during those real heyday years where I was on the bus and we had to throw everything on there and get to the next city--that was a hard time for me, because even though life was really good and things were flowing--it was a beautiful thing, but at the same time you end up losing a lot of the contact with your audience, as far as more of a personal kind of contact, because the big venues do that to you.

At one point I had these in-ear monitor things, and I needed them to save my voice because I was doing so many shows. But we had these big long microphones out into the audience so that I could hear what they were saying to me. And I couldn't tell if it was coming from the left or a right. Half the time I was looking at somebody who wasn't even the one who was talking to me. I felt removed, and I didn't get that same kind of communication thing out of it, the kind I had all those years when I was coming up through the ranks. And now I play smaller venues. I get much more of the banter back and forth. Every show is completely different because you don't know who's out there. You don't know who is going to be the star of the show that night. Sometimes it's not me. [laughs] And I love it. I totally get into it. And every single night is different to me that way. And so you don't get on the bus and feel like, *okay, well that's over*. It's not like that. You get on the bus and you go, "Did you see"--and "Did you have this"--you know, it's much more of a life and less of a job.

PM: You know what people say about you, several great and salty musician friends of mine, independently, this week said, "Frank, you'll never hear anybody say anything bad about Suzy Bogguss; she's just too fantastic a person."

SB: Well, that's nice to hear. I'm afraid that "fantastic a person" might not have been the exact words. Sometimes I worry that everybody thinks I'm like a little goody-two-shoes or something. Fortunately I have friends like Matraca Berg, who just thinks I'm rotten. She just thinks that I've got the whole world snowed. She's like, "Ah, the stuff that comes out of your mouth, you're such a sailor. I can't believe all these people think you're so sweet."

PM: Well, it's good PR, anyway, it's nice, because that's a good rep in a town like this, or any town.

SB: Well, I never did feel like there was any reason to ever attack somebody. But when I first came to town and I would hear some of the people that I was kind of competing with for the "new artist in town"--and I'd hear them maybe either on the radio or I'd hear them--this is back in the mid '80s, when I first moved here, but before I was on the radio. And I'd hear them and I'd think, "I think I could sing better than that. I think I could do this

better." And I wasn't in town for a year before I realized, you know what, it's not just about how good you sing or how hard--you know, whatever--what the hard hits were that you came through, it is like you're a hard worker and you're a talent if you can get to that place. And so at that point I realized I need to just keep my mouth shut, because I don't know what all this person has done. I don't know their influences and their background, and what all they have gone through to learn how to play an instrument or whatever, because all I know is what I did, and it was hard. And so it was hard for them, too. So I don't have any right to just go and slay them for something--for one song I might hear that might not be my favorite song they ever sang, or this or that. So that's the thing I learned early on was, best to just keep your mouth shut. You don't know. They might have written the biggest song in the whole wide world, and it might be the second single, and the one you didn't care for that much, and all of a sudden you're saying they're not a great artist. But you don't know that.

PM: And in a town like this, you never know when the person at the next table in the luncheonette wrote your favorite song.

SB: Exactly. That is exactly true.

PM: And if you don't like her dress or his shirt, it's just like, yeah, just don't worry about it. [laughs]

SB: Yeah.

PM: I was really turned on by the jazzier take you did on the classic Peter Cetera song "If You Leave Me Now." It was just unbelievable.

SB: Oh, that is so great to hear. I didn't really know how people were going to take that. I've had other songs I've covered in the past that I feared a little bit that I was treading on some pretty thin ice. But this is such a beautiful song. And sometimes I stay away from a song because I just think there is a definitive version, it should never be touched, can't do it. But in this particular case my son was singing it in the back seat, and his beautiful young boy voice just caught me--for one thing, he hates to sing in front of me. And it was just so beautiful that he was sitting there and openly letting me hear him sing. And the second thing was I never really thought of that song as such a personal, intimate little conversation.

PM: Yeah, I mean, I thought it was so much more revealed in your version than it was in the hit version.

SB: And that's a time thing. That production was way in vogue at that time, and of course Peter Cetera's voice is really hard to compete with. So I figured if I drifted down to it being this more intimate thing, this a little bit whispered thing--I mean, the honest truth is I sang it lower than he did. I sang it a half step down from where he recorded it. [laughs]

PM: Of course you did, you sang it lower than he did, right, when I'm thinking of his chorus. Right.

SB: So in a way it's kind of wild because I was messing around with it on my guitar, and I put that little yodel in there, which has always been something fun for me, I always like to break my voice. That's always been a fun thing. And I thought, well, maybe this will help to make it different enough, the fact that it's a little meatier, and that I break my voice to bring it into the higher pitch. So by keeping it a little bit lower in the body of the song it's just kind of meatier that way for me.

PM: It's an amazing--like I say, it felt more revealed to me, and you saw what a great progression of chords it was, and what a beautiful melody.

SB: That is the thing, I mean, that's what I was getting from my son, was I was just hearing the melody. And that was the part of the quest in this record, was please give me some melodies I can hold onto. I think your kids teach you so much, and I think everybody knows that, even our parents. But by watching my son and his taste, and his friends' taste, and they love--you know, he's 12 now--but starting at about 10, he started getting into bands like Chicago and Blood, Sweat & Tears, and Bob Seeger--

PM: That's amazing.

SB: --and Queen. And I kept just trying to figure out what is making these kids love this stuff--I mean, they like Weird Al Yankovic, too. But I know what they like about that. [laughs] But it's melody. There's so little melody for them to hold onto in the new songs. I just started going, "I have got to cling to the thing that made me want to sing," which was melody. And that's why I ended up writing so much of this record, is that I wanted to be in control of that, so I could take my voice where I wanted to, because I'm still learning about my voice. I mean, it's a constant [laughs] miracle to me that it just keeps going, and that I keep learning different ways to use it, and things to do with it.

PM: And of course like the rest of your body and soul, it keeps changing.

SB: It certainly does. And for me it's been fun to learn how to sing airier. I never really did that before. I always have been sort of a balls out kind of a--

PM: Yeah.

SB: You just sing like Girl Scout camp, that's just how you do it. [laughs]

PM: And it's an interesting dichotomy that you put forth, that "Give me tunes that are meatier, and a vocal approach that's a little airier."

SB: Yeah, I guess so. I didn't really think about that.

PM: Yeah, how things just keep moving. You know?

SB: Yeah.

PM: It's really amazing.

And what a fantastic hand-picked bunch of players, many of my favorite guys.

SB: Oh, my gosh, I know. I'm so lucky. [laughs]

PM: I mean, let's start with Will Barrow on piano, who first told me about this great disc when I saw him in the store; what a great musician he is.

SB: Oh, he is *so* amazing, and just such a dear. He really helps me a lot, because he tours with me all the time. And he is so forthright with his opinion when something isn't grooving, or when somehow we've strayed too much from the feel that we were going for when we initially worked it out, and things like that. And that was the way I felt--I felt like that in the studio with Will Lee. I felt like I had a bunch of big brothers in there that were being incredibly respectful, and trying so hard to make sure that I left the studio being exhilarated, but also feeling comfortable with what we had created together, like they were looking out for me. You know, "Is this what you want--are we giving you what you want here?"

PM: Wow.

SB: And it was such a beautiful recording experience--and quick, too. I mean, the whole basic recordings were done in three days.

PM: So many of our favorite records are done in three days. It's a magic number.

SB: It's true, it's true. And the continuity comes with that as well. I mean, we cut the first five tunes--in fact, we cut "In Heaven" at 1:00 in the morning. These guys were giving it all. They were like ready to bleed for me. I was like, "Well, I do have one more song." And they were like, "Let's do it! Let's get to it!"

PM: And that's a heavy tune to pull out at 1:00 in the morning.

SB: It seriously is, and especially in E-flat, which is not like--

PM: No one's favorite key.

SB: No, it's no one's favorite.

PM: Well, maybe horn players.

SB: Yeah. They do like it, yeah. And then I kind of went home with this handful of things that we had created, and I just felt like I really knew exactly how I wanted to finish

out the album. I wanted it to stay having this feeling and this groove. And then it was just a question of getting together with the right people to make that happen. I pretty much knew who I needed to write the songs with. So it was pretty fabulous.

PM: Aside from Will, a few other keyboardists figure heavily into the record, including that incredible co-producer Jason Miles, and the late beloved Carson Whitsett.

SB: Yeah. And you know what, you should have seen the love between Jason and Carson. I mean, when Jason found out Carson was sick, he was sick. He just absolutely was so distraught because he had just lost his dear, dear friend, Michael Brecker.

PM: Oh, really? I didn't know he passed on.

SB: Yes, he did. He was battling terrible--just had a bone marrow transplant and the whole deal.

PM: Oh, Lord.

SB: So that just happened too. So it was tough on Jason. But Jason is so spontaneously beautiful. I wouldn't let him change anything that he played in the live tracks.

[laughter]

SB: And he'd always--like in a way he was going, "Give me a shot, I want to show you what else I can do." And then I was going, "I know that. I know that about you, but this is what you played for me right at that moment."

[laughter]

PM: "And that's what I want."

SB: "And that's what I want. I'm sorry." So he had to kind of lay down--which everybody does that when you collaborate, sometimes you just have to trust your counterparts and say, well, that's good, what you came up with is good.

PM: Yeah, right. "I wanted the first thing you said."

SB: Uh-huh.

PM: That's beautiful.

SB: And then when Carson played, we did it at his house. We'd written one of the songs together and he was so excited that he was going to get to play on that.

PM: The one with John Vezner, "One Clear Moment."

SB: Yes. And how odd that while we were recording this, Carson was having a really difficult time with his equipment, which he doesn't normally. I mean, he was having a hard time remembering what he'd done. And it was within a week that I heard the diagnosis. So I mean, it was so quick. It was hard on his friends because we miss him terribly. But he went quickly, and did not quit working. Just got really tight with his wife and family, and they just like said, "Hey, hasn't it been a great ride?" I mean, they had the best, most beautiful attitude you've ever seen. It was awesome.

PM: Wow.

SB: But Jason was just so knocked out with Carson's playing, I kept trying to get my brain to go there; he sat there and almost wept at how pure and how Carson was the guy-- he's the guy who plays that kind of organ. And Jason doesn't play that kind of organ. So he just couldn't believe that I had brought those two together at this point in their life. And how lucky he got to be with Carson before he passed away. So it was pretty magical.

PM: Wow. And your partner and associate producer Doug Crider has four great songs, or co-writes on the record. What's he like?

SB: [laughs] Boy, that's a long story. He's a great person. I'm crazy about him. I wouldn't be married to him for 21 years otherwise. But he's so deep, and I'm privileged to sort of understand it. He sees things from a very deep attitude, but he sees them in a very simplistic way, and that is the beauty. The ultimate songwriter is somebody who can, without having to use ten million words, hit the crux of something, and just hit your emotional core like he did with "In Heaven" and with my song, years ago, with "Letting Go."

PM: Right.

SB: It's an amazing gift to be able to do that. I wish I had it. Obviously you can tell that I've had two cups of coffee this afternoon, and I'm a talkative person anyway, so my songs are the same way. I write too many words, and I can't get to a beautiful rhyme like he can get to it with the clearest thought. So I'm a huge fan of his. And also, I love his shifting melodies. Because when we write, usually I end up taking the driver's seat when it comes to the musical side of things. But then he always has some little thing, a little tweak in there that makes it brilliant, where you take it from my Peter Paul & Mary-land, to either shift the key, and we change keys in the middle of it, or something happens that is just some brilliant little morsel of an idea that takes it from being my same-old chord progression, something that I always use, to having an extra little bit of character. I love that about him as well.

PM: Must be nice to have a wife that talks about you like that. That's really great.

SB: Well, don't tell him I said that. For heaven sakes, don't write that down. I'll be having to cook fancy meals for weeks.

[laughter]

PM: I was surprised to see bassist Will Lee on so many cuts, but then I realized that you cut the record in Engelwood, New Jersey, at the Bennett Studios. That must be part of it, right? That's more his stomping ground.

SB: Totally. And he and Jason are really good friends. So Chris Parker, and Will--all of the bass players are all real good friends of Jason's. And I'm a bass freak. I absolutely--I hate bass players and I love bass players, and there's nothing in between. [laughs]

PM: Wow.

SB: I either hate it or a love it. There are certain people's tones that just absolutely send a shiver up my spine, and then there are people who--there's nothing that I think is more beautiful than a beautiful bass tone. And of course, that's a subjective thing. I'm picking out my favorite bassists.

PM: Well, yeah. That's the idea.

SB: On most of my records, Leland Sklar was my bass player, who I think has one of the most ultimately beautiful tones in the whole wide world.

PM: Talk about a sound, yeah.

SB: And all of these guys just blew me away, and just for different reasons. I mean, each one of them had a completely different tone, and a completely different touch to the way they played, but I loved all of them. So it was just so great for me.

PM: Now, is that studio in Engelwood, is that Tony Bennett's place?

SB: It certainly is.

PM: Wow. How did that come about?

SB: And his son Dae was our engineer.

PM: I've heard about this guy, his son. What's the studio and the environment there like?

SB: It's so great. It's an old train depot. So it's a very long and skinny building. And one whole side of it is glass, because it's the waiting room. Then the studios are built off on one end, and there are some offices on the other end. And the kitchen and stuff all looks out onto the street there. But get this, two times a day you have to stop recording because the train is four feet from the door. It is *four feet* from the door. And the whole building is shaking. There's no way for you to be laying anything down while that's happening. You have a forced break. And it's great. It's awesome. You know it's coming, so you just

figure out, okay, we don't want to take a take right now. "Everybody go get something to drink, come back in 20 minutes."

PM: Right. "It's 2:35, we got to break."

SB: Exactly. [more about Bennett Studios at www.bennettstudios.com]

PM: And I certainly know Engelwood and that area. I mean, it's nice to be able to get good pizza for a change.

SB: Oh, my God, you can get anything you want. I mean, the list of restaurants--I think that's the biggest challenge to the place is how are we all going to decide what restaurant we want food from, because we can have anything we want. And everybody has got their own little quirky tastes by this point in life. It's not just pizza, it's like, "Oh, I want Thai"--"Oh, I'm on an egg diet."

[laughter]

PM: And then there's a number of great guitar players on the record, but two of my favorites, Pat Bergeson and Jerry McPherson.

SB: Are they so awesome!

PM: It says so much about you that you picked those two guys. That really says a lot.

SB: Well, Pat has been my buddy for many years. Chet Atkins introduced us in 1992 and I started using him on my records back then. He and I did all the preproduction for my album with Chet.

PM: That's amazing.

SB: I have him play everything under the sun. Sometimes I have him play acoustic, sometimes electric, sometimes I have him just play harmonica, so it just depends.

PM: And he's unbelievable on the harmonica.

SB: He is absolutely unbelievable. And he plays with me on the road, too, so I feel like I'm the luckiest girl in the whole wide world.

PM: And McPherson is a real prince of a guy, too.

SB: Oh, he is a doll. And talk about walking into a groove, he just absolutely has so many beautiful transparent sounds that you don't really notice that they don't add any weight. And what they do is they make your track shimmer. You know? And it's magical. And that's another thing, I'm sort of hard on is electric guitars. [laughs] All the years of working with Brent Rowan, the two of us would just sit for hours because we'd be

looking for something special that was going to be that thing that I was hearing in my brain. And he would always just pull out all the stops and do whatever is necessary. And Jerry is the same way. It just so happened that there are a lot of things that he came up with the first time that I just went, "That's it! That's what I wanted to hear!"

PM: God, talk about a prince of a guy, Brent Rowan. I haven't thought of him in some time.

SB: Oh, he is a doll. I actually have done some shows with him recently. He's been picking, getting out and--

PM: Oh, that's great.

SB: Yeah, he's made a bunch of solo records and stuff. He plays really good.

PM: Well, I've got to catch up with him.

I really like the two Greg Barnhill co-writes on the record, the title track and the beautiful "It's Not Going To Happen Today."

SB: I appreciate that. I've done a bunch of shows with Greg, too, and songwriter things, because Kim Carnes and I are really good friends. Kim and Greg have been writing together for years, and have written a lot of hits and wonderful things. And I would always get to these songwriter things, and Greg would be there and he'd be like, "I have a scratchy throat." He'd be like, "Oh, I got to drink some Throat Coat, my throat is all"--then, you know, first song, like in the middle of the song, his voice would open up, and this monster thing would come out and just slay me with this soul.

PM: Incredible pipes.

SB: Oh, my gosh. And he is also a person who really knows how to--like he was reading my mind. I would tell him, you know, "Here is the scene I'm seeing." For instance, "Sweet Danger" was a movie scene. And I just started telling him about this great scene that I saw in the movie *Sideways*. I was talking about how I loved that feeling that I don't have anymore because I've been married forever--but back when you were considering taking a risk with another person, where it was really like, *this really could be love, but it's dangerous, because it could be love, or it could be a one-night-stand*. It could be all these different things. Greg and I just got into the conversation. And while we were talking, both of us were just like blabbing away, and I was just taking notes, and words were coming out. And every so often I'd look down at the page and I'd go--we were talking about--and I'm like, "How could this happen, I'm out with my friends, and now I'm sitting over in the corner talking to you"--and here is the first line of the song, "How could this happen"--and then there's like that feeling it's just like it's so sweet but it's so dangerous, it's like sweet danger. Okay, "Sweet Danger." And I'm just taking these little notes. And then in the meantime he's riffing on the guitar the whole time, so it's just

coming out. And it's one of those two-hour songs where you just look at it afterwards and you go, "Okay, that's done."

[laughter]

PM: Yeah, right. "What do you want to write now?"

SB: Yeah, what's next?

PM: And how about the surprising song from Verlon Thompson, "No Good Way To Go." Did he cut that, or where did you hear that?

SB: I wish you could hear his cut.

PM: Totally different?

SB: I don't think it's available, but he needs to make it available, because I don't feel right doing it myself. But he did it very bluegrass.

PM: Wow.

SB: And he has a very strong Oklahoma accent.

PM: Sure.

SB: So it's just him on his guitar, and he's playing up the neck, and he's just wailing on this guitar in a really upbeat kind of bluegrass-y thing. And Pat and Will came over to do preproduction, which is how I always do everything before I cut. I don't like to go into the studio with a demo that has everything already mapped out because you can never beat it. So I like to go in the studio with an acoustic guitar demo, or an acoustic and a piano that's really just the basics. "Let's get the chord progression down, let's figure out how many times we're going to do the verse," that kind of thing, just the basics. And so that's what I took in to Will Lee and those guys. And when Chris Parker and Will Lee got a hold of this version that Will Barrow and Pat Bergeson had done, they just put a bass line and a drum beat to it--

PM: Wow.

SB: --because all it was was just that little piano thing that's going [singing] "bum, bump, bump-a-dum-bom, bom, bom, bompa-dom-bump"--I mean, it could have been "Mission Impossible." You know?

PM: [laughs]

SB: But when they got underneath it with that New York groove, it turned into this other song. And I just kind of went, "I can do that."

PM: Yeah, "Let me at that."

SB: [laughs] It was fun. It was so fun, because it was like playing a part as an actor or something.

PM: So has Verlon heard that version?

SB: He just heard it a couple of days ago. I just got a call from him, he just loves it. He loves the whole record.

PM: He must have been tickled out of his mind.

SB: He laughed his butt off, he said, for a long time. And then afterwards he was like, "That is frickin' so cool!" But his version is killer, too.

PM: No doubt.

SB: I mean, that's the thing, it's such a cool little idea, that self banter, back and forth of like, "I know I can do this"--"No, you can't do this, it's going to be a drag--just don't do it, man, it's going to be terrible."

PM: I can't wait until Peter Cetera hears your version of "If You Leave Me Now." Or has he?

SB: Well, I sent it to him. I don't know if he's heard it or not. I have a friend who is real close with him, so I sent it to him like a month ago.

PM: [laughs] Well, I could go on, but I've taken a lot of your Tuesday, not your interview day. But I really love what you've done on *Sweet Danger*. And personally, I see what everybody is talking about.

SB: Well, I'm glad that they're talking about it. That makes me so happy. I'm so glad that you felt like it was a comfort zone for you, because I so feel like that. And I feel like it's not like some giant leap when you get into the songs, they're really just songs I would sing, or write, or whatever. I just want people to listen to it enough so that they know--don't try to make it something that already happened, make it something that's happening now.

PM: And I can't wait until sometime in the near future when we get to do a video interview with you, and sit down, maybe you and your guitar, and play a couple of songs, and have another conversation about where it's all at. Thanks for your time, Suzy, very nice to meet you.

SB: Thank you, Frank. It was great talking with you.