

Country Singer Laura Bryna

Bird mom and rising country star Laura Bryna spends time with her birds at home and on the road. The birds will have their own room on the tour bus!

By Susan Chamberlain

Even before I met Laura Bryna, I knew that I was in for a treat. Strategically placed signs at the entrance to her suburban Nashville condo read "Caution! Cockatoo with attitude" and "Parrot Lover Parking Only ... All others will be walkin' and squawkin'!"

Inside the luxuriously appointed, sun-drenched apartment, my gaze landed on the big-enough-for-three parrot playstand in the corner of the living room. In the kitchen, a row of exotic bird figurines decorated the top of the refrigerator. Bryna entered the room with a dazzling smile and a cockatoo on her arm. Aptly named Snuggle, the lesser sulphur-crested 'too cuddled against Bryna's arm and raised a wing to be petted. Harmony, a Senegal parrot, and Tyler, an African grey joined us in short order, and the three birds vied for Bryna's attention as we talked.

Bryna is an up-and-coming country music artist signed with Clint Black's Equity Label. At this writing, she is finishing her debut album, scheduled for release this summer. Originally from Maryland, Bryna headed straight for Music Row, the center of the Nashville recording industry, when she finished college. "I knew Nashville was the place I had to be if I was going to pursue music," she said.

The still-untitled album's August release target date will follow a nationwide radio tour beginning in May and the release of a single from the album in June. Some of the songs on the CD will be "Set it on Fire," "Smoke from a Bridge You Burned," "Second Cup of Coffee," and "Make a Wish." The inspiration for "Make a Wish" evolved from Bryna's work with the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

When country music performers go on the road, they usually travel in specially outfitted tour buses. Bryna plans to include custom quarters on her bus for the birds. "If I'm going to be gone for any length of time, I'd have to bring them with me," she said. "Of course they'll have their own room on the bus!"

In the meantime, Bryna swaps bird-sitting services with a cockatoo owner whom she met at Starbucks while on a break from working in the studio. "She was new in town, so I told her about my bird vet and the best places to get supplies and food," Bryna said. "We exchanged phone numbers, and the next day, I called and asked how she'd feel about bird-sitting once in awhile."

"She came over, and we've been friends ever since," she said. "Her birds are compatible with mine, and there's a lot of talking going on when they visit."

Growing Avian Family

Senegal Harmony came into Bryna's life first. While attending the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, Bryna spent her free time visiting Todd Marcus' Birds Exotic (www.thebirdstore.com). Captivated by the parrots she met and interacted with there, she felt a special affinity for the little Senegal and brought him home.

Within six months, Snuggle and Tyler joined Bryna's avian family. Tyler loves to talk. He speaks in Bryna's voice and often admonishes Snuggle to pipe down with a "Quiet, Snug!"

Snuggle loves to be where the action is. "She even has her own makeup brush," said Bryna with a laugh. "She loves to come into the bathroom when I do my makeup, so she has her own brush to play with." Bryna occasionally coordinates her eye makeup with the colors of one of her birds.

The flock gets along exceedingly well, and the birds often occupy separate branches on one of several playgyms. As sometimes happens with greys and Senegals, the African birds are best buddies and even preen each other. Bryna closely supervises their out-of-the-cage time and makes a point of spending some quality time with each bird every day to keep the flock peaceful and happy.

What does country music's rising star keep in her refrigerator? "There's more bird food than people food in there," joked

Bryna. She wasn't exaggerating. Further inspection revealed numerous bags and containers of bird food and treats. Tyler, who was on Bryna's shoulder, became very interested in their contents!

The birds seem to enjoy their country music lifestyle. "They chime right in with the radio in the car, and when I rehearse at home, they dance and sing along. They even pick up the harmony parts!" Bryna said. "They're my inspiration.

The thing about birds, and other pets, too, is that they're always there for you. They give so much love and comfort. They just seem to know when you're having a bad day."

As focused as Bryna is on her career, Todd Marcus remembers her as a caring, down-to-earth person. "She used to come into the store often and was very much into her birds," Marcus recalled. "We miss her now that she's moved to Tennessee. I hope to see her onstage at the Country Music Awards someday ... with a bird on her shoulder." We'll all be watching for you, Laura Bryna.

Visit <http://www.laurabryna.com/> for updates and tour schedule.