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Chat With Brad Avery of Third Day



Christian Music has come a long way in the past 10 years. A decade ago, the industry seemed to be full of sub-par music and trendy bands that lacked musical depth. Fortunately for those of the faith who enjoy quality rock music, this has drastically changed! Today, much of Contemporary Christian Music can and does compete directly with mainstream product and holds up very well. One of the reasons for the change is the emergence of quality bands like [Third Day](#). Coming on the scene in 1996 with their critically acclaimed "Third Day" project, the five piece rock band out of Atlanta soon began dominating the CCM charts with their in-your-face guitar driven rock and roll sound. Mega hits like "I've Always Loved You", "What Good", "Come Together" and the Rockin' remake of Michael W. Smith's "Agnus Dei" have established Third Day as the

reigning Kings of Contemporary Christian Rock and Roll. Epiphone's Don Mitchell recently had the opportunity to talk with Lead Guitarist Brad Avery.

EPI: Hey Brad, congratulations on the success that Third Day has found. Tell me what you guys are up to these days?

BRAD: Well, we are finishing up our new album that will be released on May 4, 2004. The name of the new album is WIRE and we are really excited about it.

EPI: You guys have pretty much owned the Contemporary Christian Market over the past few years, are there any plans to move beyond the walls of the church with the new project?

BRAD: We do feel like this record will help broaden our audience. We've had some general market success in the past....a song called "Nothing At All" on our first project went top 30 on the Rock charts but we've really just been making Third Day records. We haven't really tried to write for anybody but ourselves and our audience. Our last two records have been worship records which I guess are primarily for the church but this record returns to straight ahead rock & roll and we have a lot of things in place to help us work this record to the general market that we haven't had in the past.

EPI: So this is really your first push to the general market?

BRAD: Yes, on the first record it was really an underground thing that started in Dallas, where somebody got a hold of it and started a buzz. We hopped on board but we really didn't have much to do with it. (laughs) This time we have all the things in line to make the proper push. Our parent label, RCA Nashville is on board and we fill like our core fans will support us.

EPI: You found success at a relatively young age in Third Day but tell me about your early guitar years and how that kind of developed.

BRAD: I grew up in a musical family and I was a pastors kid so I was on stage playing and singing in church from an early age. My dad plays guitar among other instruments so he kind of got me started on guitar. When I was about five he showed me some chords and stuff but the bug really hit me when I was around twelve. I asked for and got an electric guitar that Christmas and that's





really when I started getting serious about playing. I listened to the music that my older brothers were listening to.... this was back in the early 80's so most of what was on the radio then was an influence on me. Really, all of it. Not just hair rock but 80's rock and pop in general. One guy that I listened to during that time that had a huge impact on me was George Lynch of Dokken. He was such a good player and great lead player and had all these incredible voicings, riffs and runs. I played in church a lot but I never really played in bands or anything in high school. I was kind of a closet musician playing guitar in my

room you know. At the time I was too intimidated to play lead guitar so I determined that I was just going to be a rhythm player.

I didn't jump into my first band until my freshman year of college when I did some touring with a company out of Florida. We did assemblies in schools using pop music to promote self esteem and stay away from drugs and alcohol themes. That's where I really cut my teeth. I was forced to learn pop music and how to play leads since I was the only guitarist in the band and that forced me to start developing my own style and my own voice on guitar. I did it for 2 years and it was grueling! Basically we did three shows a day. We'd set up in the morning at a school, do a show, tear down and go to the next school for an after lunch show, then do another one that night! We did about 500 shows per year for 2 years so it was a lot of playing, traveling and little sleep! It taught me a lot, including how to get along with people since we were a bunch of guys from all different backgrounds. During my second year, not only was I a performer but a performing manager as well so I learned a lot about PR. That allowed me to kind of get my head around the business side of things too.

EPI: A lot of guys don't like working in a 2 guitar band. How has working with Mark Lee effected you?

BRAD: Third day was my first experience in a two guitar band. When I first joined they were really an acoustic band and looking to add a more electric, aggressive side which is why I was asked to join. So my role was pretty defined coming in and since we are from differing schools we really have never stepped on each others toes. I'm kind of the Yankee in the band, playing with all these southern boys. Mark grew up on country music...real country music like Buck Owens and Hank. That was his love along with Americana and Southern Rock so his approach was different than my 80's pop/rock approach. Because of it,

we have totally different styles. It's been good for us because after eleven years of playing together we've been able to steal from each other (laughs) but we approach things differently so usually we don't get in each others way.

EPI: So what are some of your favorite Brad Avery moments on Third Day projects?

BRAD: I like the more aggressive side of our music so usually what is my favorite is not necessarily what our fans like. It's usually the quirky things that stick out to me. On the second record, Conspiracy #5, there's a song called "This Song Was Meant For You" which I play an Ebow thing on that I like. It's real cello sounding and melodic. I kind of got married to the Ebow back then because it gave me a



different texture to apply. I think one of the better solos that I've done is on a song called "Give Me A Reason". It was a solo that I built, not an improvised one. I built it before I played it and I think it was a really good moment. Also, there's a song called "Gomers Theme" that has an outro that I like. I really enjoy it because I'm just going for it and it's this passionate thing where the guitars feeding back and kind of out of control. On the new record there's a lot of riffs I was able to incorporate that I like. I guess I'm a riff guy. Also, on the title cut "Wire" I got to do some cool acoustic stuff with some weird voicings that I think people will like. I used the DADGAD tuning.

EPI: Are your solos more worked out or improvised?

BRAD: Well, I do both. On the past few records though a lot of it has been improv because of the way we have tracked. For instance the last three records were really tracked live so we were doing kind of the song a day approach so a lot of those were improvised. The new record is a little bit of both. Some of these songs were demoed 12 months ago so the solos were kind of set and I just took the main ideas and embellished them. I guess they were produced but out of the original improvisations.

EPI: Do you have room in your live show to kind of cut loose and improvise?

BRAD: Well, we're not the jam band that has 7 or 8 minute songs that we just jam on but we do jam some and there are times in the show where I can let it all

hang out and go for it...but not in every song.

EPI: Tell me about your gear.

BRAD: Guitar wise my main guitar is still the white [Epiphone LP Custom](#) that I've had for several years. I've taken the pickguard off and dropped in [classic 57s](#) and it remains my main guitar. On this album Epi did hook me up with an [Elitist Standard Plus](#) that was really awesome and an [Elitist J45](#) which I used for the acoustic tracks. But the Custom is my workhorse guitar. Also, besides the white Paul, a guitar that I call the "Salvation Piece" when it comes to records is the Epiphone [Riviera-12](#) String that you hooked me up with way back when. It's just so beautifully bright and adds texture to songs that make them pop. I've used it quite a bit with the stock Epi pickups and it sounds great. On the new record there is a song called "It's A Shame" where we wanted this high jangly part. Believe it or not, I capoed the Riviera-12 at the ninth fret and played the part. You would imagine that capoing a 12-string at the ninth fret would be a nightmare but the Riviera behaved beautifully! But the white Custom blew away any other guitar we had in the studio and this really is a testament to Epi ..I mean through our producer we had guys bring trucks full of guitars to our sessions and my Epiphones stood up every time. We ended up using them over all these other instruments, even the vintage stuff brought in.

EPI: That's great! That's what we like to hear!

BRAD: It is great. That's why I've stuck with Epiphone over the years. We've had a lot of success and along the way Epi has been good to me and their guitars have been great.

EPI: What about your rig set-up?

BRAD: Well, for the last 4 years I've been using a Matchless Chieftan through an early 70's Marshal 4x12 with Vintage 30s. But I just got this amp from Epi called a [Galaxy 25](#) and it has blown me away. I used it on every song on the new project. It's a 25 watt amp but doesn't behave like a small amp. It sounds huge! If you get on the thing it will just get up and rock but if you back it off to like five it cleans up so nice. I'm going to take out a wall of them, probably 3 on top with cabinets underneath on this next tour. They ROCK....they really do! I run my effects through a Bob Bradshaw rig but I'm not really using the switching system like its supposed to be used. I'm basically just using it so that I can have a loop for each stomp box. It's basically just a way I can have my stomp boxes in a tray in a rack.

EPI: Thanks Brad for taking the time to talk to us today. Epiphone is proud to be associated with you and Third Day and look forward to seeing what's in store for you guys in 2004!



Be sure and visit Third Day on-line at www.thirdday.com.