

Friday, September 30, 2005

Dwight Yoakam - An Interview



Kentucky native Dwight Yoakam blazed out of the Los Angeles club scene in 1986 with his debut *Guitars, Cadillacs, Etc., Etc.*, which went on to score double-platinum status. This was followed by a string of hugely successful albums including *Hillbilly Deluxe*, *A Lonely Room*, *Just Lookin' For A Hit*, to name a few and the triple-platinum milestone *This Time* featuring the Grammy-winning single "Ain't That Lonely Yet" and his signature hit "Fast As You." Dwight's version of the Queen classic "Crazy Little Thing Called Love" debuted during the 1999 Academy Awards telecast in a national ad campaign for Gap clothing stores and went on to become another Top-Ten hit.

The two-time Grammy winner has garnered 21 nominations in the course of his career, while selling more than 23 million albums worldwide and earning praise from the likes of *Time* magazine, hailing him as "A Renaissance Man," *Rolling Stone*, noting "he has no contemporary peer," and *Vanity Fair*, claiming "Yoakam strides the divide between rock's lust and country's lament."

Epi's Don Mitchell recently spoke with Dwight about his musical roots, his Epiphone Casino and his latest project "Blame The Vain".

EPI: What is your earliest recollection of music in your life? How old were you?

DWIGHT: Sitting on a couch lovingly wedged between my mother and her older sister, my Aunt Margaret, on a Saturday night, facing a phonograph and singing at the top of our lungs with the record "Send Me The Pillow That You Dream On." I was about two-and-a-half years old.

EPI: So those type of experiences with your family were what inspired your love of music?

DWIGHT: Yes, times like those in front of a radio and also just riding in the car. I was inundated with music anytime we traveled anywhere in a car. It was a wonderful period in radio where formats were much more inclusive of genre and style. Additionally, the explosion of the television culture had an impact. From the time I was born, in 1956 up through the 1960's and into the early 70's I was infatuated with artists I'd see perform on national shows like Ed Sullivan, Shindig, Hullabaloo, American Bandstand, Don Kirshner's Rock Concert, and Where The Action Is, as well as local shows like Mid-Western Hayride on WLW out of Cincinnati, Ohio.

EPI: At what point did you pick up your first guitar?

DWIGHT: My father brought home a Kay F-Hole Acoustic guitar when he was discharged from the army and never learned to play it. I was so infatuated with the performers I saw on TV and heard on the radio, that I was constantly dragging that guitar around with me. I'd pose with it and try desperately to imitate those artists, not exhibiting much skill, but never lacking enthusiasm. There are pictures of me with that guitar, and with my Granny, Earlene Tibbs on the Box Set, Reprise Please Baby and the back of the 1989 album, Just Lookin' For A Hit. I was two when that picture was taken.



EPI: You were born in Kentucky, then moved on to Ohio and eventually California. How old were you when you went west? Did you consciously stay away from Nashville and the so-called country music "scene"?

DWIGHT: In 1976, when I was twenty,



I stopped going to class at Ohio State University and headed to Los Angeles with a guitar player friend of mine. I had spent some time the previous year in Nashville and auditioned as a performer for Opryland and was chosen as an alternate. So I wouldn't say that I consciously chose to discard the idea of going to Nashville, but rather decided to pursue the alternative opportunities that might come with moving

to the West Coast and specifically southern California. I had also become infatuated with the West Coast country and country rock scene: beginning with the music of The Byrds, The Eagles, Linda Ronstadt, as well as Buck Owens, Merle Haggard, and the whole Bakersfield sound. Emmylou Harris and her Hot Band and their music in the mid 70s, which included Ricky Skaggs and Rodney Crowell also had a big impact on me. The historical co-mingling of traditional country music and rock and roll performers in venues that spanned the spectrum from the hippy folk atmosphere of the Troubadour in West Hollywood to the glass slamming bottle breaking raucous of the Palomino Club in North Hollywood turned out to be the perfect environment to evolve in as a singer-songwriter. After a couple of years, I realized that Southern California had become my home. I have often said that I was born in Kentucky, raised in Ohio, but grew up – “came of age” in California.


EPI: We are loving all the photos and video we are seeing of you with the Epiphone Casino, in relation to your new project, “Blame the Vain”. What is it you like about the Casino?

DWIGHT: Since I was a kid, I've always liked the aesthetics of the Casino... every since I saw the Beatles playing them. I believe George and John used a matching pair of Sunburst Casinos, starting about the time of Rubber Soul. Of course as you guys at Epi know, John later sanded his sunburst into a natural, which is what he used when he was playing in the famous film footage shot on top of London's Abbey Road Studios in 1968 or 1969.



[\(Ed.Note: For more about John Lennon's Casinos CLICK HERE.\)](#)

But, what caused me to continue to want to perform with it throughout this tour, is the wonderful grizzly and twangy sound of the “dog ear” pickups. I find the



Elitist Casino to be a completely compatible match for the ground up glass sounds of a Vox AC-30 amplifier.

EPI: You jumped into the Producers chair for your latest project, "Blame the Vain". How has taking on the Producers role been for you?

DWIGHT: This album was in rehearsing, recording, and continues to be in performing, a journey of reckless joy and expressive exhilaration for me, and I hope everyone that comes to it as a listener derives as much pleasure from hearing it as I did creating and producing it.

For more information about Dwight Yoakam visit www.DwightYoakam.com

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