

Thursday, September 29, 2005

JT Woodruff and Micah Carli Power Hawthorne Heights With Epis



PHOTO: Anna Perry

Influenced by bands that range from Led Zeppelin to Quicksand to Nirvana and Shades Apart, Hawthorne Heights's brand of radiant and fiery post-hardcore is expansive yet more focused than the efforts of other bands they will be categorized with. Their triple guitar attack alone sets them apart from the rest. Epiphone's Don Mitchell recently chatted with Vocalist/Guitar player JT Woodruff and guitarist Micah Carli.

EPI: Thanks guys for taking the time to talk with me today. Tell me what it was that initially drew each of you to the guitar.

JT: A bunch of my friends in college were playing guitar so that is where I first got interested but I guess the first guitar player that really caught my ear was Slash from Guns N' Roses. I really liked how he approached his solos with a melodic sense but still could rip and shred! I also like how he never overplayed and yet his solos always had this presence in the track. I noticed the lead in Sweet Child Of Mine ten years before I even knew the difference between a guitar and bass.

MICAH: My dad played guitar. Nothing too serious, more just for fun but he always had a couple of acoustics lying around. Once I started playing I was totally spurred on by how fun it was to figure out my favorite songs. As feeble as

my skills were back then, it was still incredible. I would play for eight hours a day, quitting only when my fingers would start bleeding.

EPI: Slash obviously had a profound impact on JT, how about you Micah? Any guitarists in particular that inspired you along the way?

MICAH: The song that actually started it for me was "Mary Jane's Last Dance" by Tom Petty but I really looked up to the classic rock greats like Hendrix and Jimmy Page. A bit cliché I admit but they're too damn good to ignore.

EPI: Did you guys learn to play by the book or are you more self educated in guitar?



JT: I have never taken a formal lesson from anyone which is probably not a good thing! Like I said before, I have always seemed to have friends that play guitar, so I've been able to pick up things here and there just by hanging with other guitarists. I personally believe that playing in different bands with different people can teach you most of what you need to know. You just need to practice! Mel bay books will always help too. I have learned a chord or two from that guy!

MICAH: I really just taught myself to play. I had a little music experience prior and a decent ear for figuring out chords and melodies just by listening to the records. Definitely hit up the tablature websites to get me going sometimes though. I eventually took a few lessons

several years later when I started trying to learn jazz guitar. That style knocked me on my ass and I still don't think I really understand it very well... but I can fake it a bit!

EPI: You guys are certainly seeing a lot of success with Hawthorne Heights! How did all this start and what were the circumstances that lead up to signing with Victory Records?

MICAH: Hawthorne Heights was formed out of people brought together through another band called "A Day in the Life." JT is the only original member of that band remaining. All the rest of us had come in to replace others so we thought it was a good idea to just start fresh since the style had progressed and we had

had so many member changes....hence Hawthorne Heights.

JT: I like to say we formed from the ashes of "A Day in the Life"!

MICAH: (laughs) We spent several months as Hawthorne Heights writing and demoing songs, really taking our time and eventually sent them out to several labels. We were ecstatic to have any responses good or bad but it seemed unreal when Victory Records, our first choice, was the most emphatic about working together. We played a private showcase for the entire staff of Victory, made the 5 hour drive home from Chicago thinking we played horribly having been so nervous and the next day we were contacted with the good news. This all happened around late November 2003.

JT: When we progressed into Hawthorne Heights we started working harder at writing songs instead of playing shows. We wrote each part with a lot more in mind and we wanted the songs to flow a lot better. The result was a two song demo that we sent out to tons of labels. Victory Records liked what they heard and contacted us.

EPI: How has being located in the Midwest as opposed to one of the "Music Cities" like New York or Los Angeles effected your career? Have you seen any clear advantages or disadvantages?

JT: Well, there are not tons of industry people in our city. Actually, there are no industry people in Dayton, Ohio! I think it has been very good though, because it has helped our work ethic. We have had to build our fanbase, by being on the road. Also, there aren't hundreds of musicians there so bands have to rely on their friends which promotes better networking. I am completely happy with where we are and where we are from. I like to visit New York and Los Angeles, but do not want to live there any time soon.

MICAH: I'm sure it has effected us in both good and bad ways. To be honest with you, we had pretty small expectations initially... I mean in all seriousness, who comes from Ohio? But even though the music scene is fairly small compared to those other cities, the kids are so supportive, maybe even more so than in bigger cities where there are tons of bands.

EPI: A lot of players don't like playing in bands with another guitar player and yet you guys have made it work with three. What advantages do you see in the three guitar attack? Any problems?

MICAH: I really enjoy it. The freedom of getting to experiment more with both melody and riffs is great. Each of us play guitar differently anyway and we all have our strengths and weaknesses but together we're able to support each other. It also really helps us to more accurately reproduce our recordings in a

live situation. We just have to be sure that our parts and tones don't take away from each other. Organizing three parts without having the sound jumbled together or forced can be taxing sometimes but if you get it right it can be so f***ing cool!

JT: I love being a three guitar player band. I think that there are three different ways to look at things now. We are always coming up with drastically different ideas and I think we make it work because we play to each other's strengths. And like Micah said, we can really recreate our CD sound on stage which is a huge plus.

EPI: How was your experience on the Warped Tour?

JT: The warped tour was absolutely incredible. There were so many bands to make friends with and everybody got along great. And the audiences were great! Every day there were thousands of kids singing along with all of the bands. The only hard part was the scavenger hunts for the showers and clean bathrooms!

MICAH: Yeah, Warped Tour was awesome. The kids were incredible! The way they came out to support everyone in some of the harshest weather conditions I've ever played in was amazing. It was such a treat to play to great crowds that went on as far as you could see from the stage. And it was really cool to be on tour with so many great bands. I was able to meet some of my favorite bands like The Offspring and befriend a lot a great newer bands like Underoath, [My Chem](#) and Atreyu.

EPI: Tell me about your experience on the Kimmel show.

JT: The Kimmel show was a great experience. It was like nothing we have ever done before, although a little nerveracking. Playing on TV is way different than just playing a show because you have to live with all of your mistakes! You are caught on film! (laughs) Jimmy and the staff were great and treated us very well. They gave us dinner at the Hamburger Hamlet which is a great burger place in Hollywood and we got to stay at the famous Roosevelt Hotel, which was grand... and we met comedian Paul Mooney in the lobby!



MICAH: Being our first real performance on TV definitely made it a little nerve racking but again everyone was so cool, they made it easy. Jimmy was very friendly and stayed to watch our whole set, which I thought was really nice. It's funny how when you play a show like that you psyche yourself out thinking about how many people may be watching but as soon as the song starts you realize "Oh wait, I've played these songs a thousands times, what the hell is there to be nervous about?!"

EPI: People are anxiously awaiting the new project from Hawthorne Heights. How is it coming along and what is it like to work with David Bendeth?

JT: The new album is coming along better than we could have expected and working with David has been great! He has a fresh ear for us and he comes in with so much experience. He has taught us so much in the area of developing good ideas into wonderful ideas and it has been an awesome experience to work with him. I can't wait for the finished product.

MICAH: We're about three weeks into it at the moment and we're just getting into the bulk of the guitar work now. I'm really pleased with the songs we have written and like JT said, working with David Bendeth has been awesome. This guys really knows his s***, and it becomes more and more obvious everyday. The way he's organizing our songs sonically is incredible as well as the way he works with us to get the best performance for each part. I really feel as though we're not only going to have a killer record when we're done, we're also going to be a better band. It's exciting!

EPI: We are thrilled that you guys choose to play Epiphone guitars!

JT: I had always played Gibson guitars, when I could afford them, so I was kind of partial to them. But I gave the Epiphones a shot and fell in love. The Elitist series is off the hook! My [Elitist SG Standard](#) held up very nicely over Warped Tour and for the people that have seen us live, they know that we slam around the stage a bunch. Despite the craziness, my guitar always stays in tune.

MICAH: I love my Epiphone guitars. What more could you ask for? They sound amazing, they play great and they're reliable.

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