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An Interview With Luther Dickinson Of The North Mississippi Allstars

The [North Mississippi Allstars](#) are indeed one of the most intriguing acts to emerge from the Southern Blues and Roots Rock world in recent years. Guitarist and Epiphone player Luther Dickinson along with brother Cody on drums and bassist Chris Chew have established themselves as one of the most potent live bands in America. With their latest project “Electric Blue Watermelon” slated to hit stores on September 6th, Epiphone’s Don Mitchell had the chance to chat with Luther from his hotel room in Boulder, Colorado where NMA is in the midst of a tour opening for and backing the legendary John Hiatt.

EPI: Tell me about your development as a guitar player.

LUTHER: Well, I came from a musical environment. They tell me that my first word was actually “studio” which is pretty funny! Being around my father and all his friends at an early age was a big influence and I knew I wanted to play guitar when I was just a little kid. My brother Cody and I started our first band when I was in the third grade and I’ve been messing around with bands ever since. I started playing professionally when I was fifteen and I’m thirty-two now so it’s just been a long progression of experimenting with different styles of music and studying those styles. I’ve really tried to learn as many of the traditional, rootsy types of music that I could. I’ve studied everything from Memphis Rock&Roll to R&B to Rockabilly and of course The Blues. I’ve just kind of been playing forever.

EPI: It sounds like you were blessed to be born into a very musical atmosphere.

LUTHER: Yeah, when I was very young my dad was doing a lot of music for movies and also some records in California with guys



like Ry Cooder, who is just an amazing guitar player! He was definitely an inspiration for me. Dad also worked with The Replacements when I was about thirteen or fourteen. I learned a whole lot by studying Paul Westerberg back then including a lot about writing songs. Dad would be at work and I would be at home with the demos picking them apart!

EPI: Tell me about your new project , "[Electric Blue Watermelon](#)".

LUTHER: I'm really proud of this record. It's done and will be coming out on September 6th. We're back to a trio with dad producing and I think it's the best collaboration we've ever done. The timing was right, the material was right and everybody was in the right frame of mind. The songs are kind of modern folk songs about heroes in my life. Guys like Kenny Brown and Junior Kimbrough.

EPI: What is the writing process like for you?

LUTHER: Most of it is collaborative. The music comes many times at sound check on the road and then I'll come in later and finish it up and bring in lyrics. There are times that I'll bring something in cold but my favorites are the ones we work on together. Those songs have a unique sound that the others really don't have.

EPI: You recently played on John Hiatt's new CD "Master of Disaster" and you are currently on the road as his backing band. How did that come about?



LUTHER: Earlier I was talking about my dad working with Ry Cooder in the eighties...well, he also worked with Hiatt so they've known each other and worked with each other for a long time. He had planned to do a solo acoustic project but changed his mind and called dad and us to help out. He came to Memphis and we knocked it out in about two weeks. It was great because everything was live.

EPI: So he sang while you tracked?

LUTHER: Yes, it was amazing.

EPI: How is it working with John in a live, road situation?

LUTHER: Oh Man, it's great. He's been so cool and patient with us. We had to learn twenty eight songs and be ready to go in two weeks.

He's got some great tunes and he's just an amazing singer. We're having a ball and musically its real natural for us. The tunes are right up our alley.

EPI: With all those songs do you play the same set every night or do you mix it up?

LUTHER: No we switch it up. John's got kind of a rough outline but he'll switch it up... sometimes even in the middle of the set!

EPI: That keeps you on your toes and keeps it fresh!

LUTHER: Definitely man, which is important.

EPI: Tell me about your Epiphones.

LUTHER: When I was about fourteen, I got an [Epiphone Casino](#). I still have that guitar and play it all the time. I also have an [Epiphone Korina Flying V](#) that I love...that thing sounds so damn good...and an Epiphone [Elitist Les Paul Standard](#) that I love. There's just something about the Flying V and that Elitist that sound so good. Maybe I shouldn't say this but they sound "bouncier" than the standard Les Pauls I've played. There's just something about them and their character that I really like. By the way, the Casino and the Flying V are all over the new CD. I also have a couple of the [Masterbilt](#) acoustics. I love the way the finish on them is so light. They have a real natural feel to them.

EPI: We are thrilled that you love our guitars and look forward to what the future holds for you and the North Mississippi Allstars! Thanks for taking the time to chat!

LUTHER: My pleasure!



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