



Who's Gonna Fill Their Shoes?

Dwight Yoakam — a Blue Jean Baby

If some image and marketing consultants had set out to concoct a blueprint of a new star that could revitalise country music and bring it a fresh young audience, they couldn't have done much better than design a Dwight Yoakam.

Here's a young (29) good-looking singer/songwriter with all the right credentials to play a pure, hard form of country music with enough panache to sell it to both rock and roll and country crowds.

The critical bush telegraph has been banging the drums on Yoakam's behalf for a couple of years now, and the release of his debut album, *Guitars, Cadillacs, Etc., Etc.* has found a public more than willing to join the party. Topping the country charts first time out is something the Kentucky kid may have long dreamed about, but the record's crossover to American pop and rock charts is of equal significance.

We finally tracked the nomadic Dwight down in Nashville, an irony that would later be revealed, and he proved a passionately eloquent interview subject. He may have a hillbilly heart, but his intelligence is an incisive, sophisticated one.

While saying he's "very fortunate" to have a country hit on his hands, Yoakam (only in country music would you keep a name like that) is not surprised that *Guitars, Cadillacs* has registered on rock charts and hip university radio.

"We come out of the rock and roll scene," he says. "We've been touring with Los Lobos, X, the Blasters and Lone Justice, and just played New York with Husker Du and the Violent Femmes. We're brand new to a country audience, which works off hits, what they hear on the radio. We're just making our presence felt there now."

hillbilly hymns. I'd listen to Hank Williams, Stonewall Jackson, Johnny Horton, early Johnny Cash and Elvis. I was infatuated with all those forms. I was never a big rock fan, but I'd listen to the Stones, Led Zeppelin, and of course Creedence, because those forms are based in pure blues and country.

"John Fogerty saved me from being totally ostracised by my peers in Columbus, Ohio. They didn't want to listen to my Lester Flatt and Earl

execs intent on sweetening and softening country music. Next stop was California.

"One of the reasons I moved to the West Coast were the encouraging signs I saw from people like John Fogerty, Emmylou Harris and the Gram Parsons influence there. I was listening to all that. What Fogerty did in 1973 with his *Blue Ridge Rangers* LP was closer to Hank Williams Sr than anything coming out of Nashville then."

After struggling around the honky tonk circuit, Yoakam's career began to progress when he tapped into the burgeoning Los Angeles cow-punk scene. "It wasn't until that crowd became a reality that we were able to play the rock clubs. By 1983, the cow-punk movement had taken hold via bands like Rank and File, Lone Justice, Blood on the Saddle and the Knitters."

It must have taken some nerve to test hillbilly music out on ferocious-looking LA punks, but they approved. "I had ambivalent feelings," says Yoakam. "I wasn't sure how sincere they'd be. When we walked out, we put them to the test by playing George Jones, and they reacted by showing extreme support."

That crowd stuck with him. "At my shows now, there'll be 40 percent country fans and 60 percent young kids, fans of Los Lobos or Husker Du. The rockers and kids in mohawks will be in the bone-crushing front, the country-lovers in George Strait hats out on the periphery."

Hobos and Honky Tonks

Judging by his LA friends, you'd expect Yoakam to sound cow-punkish, but his music really is pure, unadulterated honky tonk/hillbilly music. His first hit, a cover of Johnny Horton's 'Honky Tonk Man', sums up his sensibility, while songs like 'Guitars, Cadillacs', 'South of Cincinnati' and 'Miner's Prayer' prove his original songwriting talent.

"We're a new generation of West Coast honky tonkers," is Dwight's description. "There's a great history of country music there, such as Merle Haggard and Buck Owens, and I think that helps distinguish us from those other acts."

"Those others" refers to the likes of Ricky Scaggs, George Strait and Randy Travis, a new breed of country acts pumping life into an overly formulaised form. Venom pours out of the generally soft-spoken Yoakam when he talks of the bastardisation of country music by the Nashville establishment.

"They've aligned themselves with pop. They've pop-ified country with the gloss-over stuff that became part of the reality of Nashville in the 70s. The resistance to real country has come from the record label execs. Radio can only play what they're sent, and the listener is the least of the problems. I believe they'll remain absolute enthusiasts for country music, as illustrated by people like Ricky and George selling platinum."

His righteous anger increases when the topic of country's political conservatism or bigotry is raised.

"You're from New Zealand, right? Well, if you know anything about American history, you'll realise that hillbilly/honky tonk music is an ethnic art form, but the ethnicity is cultural."

"In the 60s, arrogant carpetbagging politicians embraced country music as a conservative and right-wing musical form. Yet it was always considered an underprivileged, disdained music by those people in the 30s and 40s. It was then the music of the rebellious, rioting miners, the hobos and boxcar riders like Jimmie Rodgers. It was considered very left-wing, the music of the under-class."

"But country gave birth to a far greater threat, rock and roll. Honky tonk music was the lesser of two evils, so these politicians embraced it to try and win votes. I detest that! My grandad was a coalminer who literally coughed his lungs out from black lung ['Miner's Prayer' is Dwight's tribute to him]. He was exploited by the same people who embraced his musical form 30 years later and prostituted it."

"Right now, the politicians think they got country music whipped, but what they did was create a different form of music that is no longer country. What I'm doing is

country music, and we ain't whipped!"

Yoakam's country crusade is now going international. He's just visited England, and he informed me that a swing through Japan later this year may include a leg down our way. He's been hailed as the new Hank Williams or Gram Parsons, but such tags mislead. Dwight Yoakam may, however, be just the figure country music needs to bring it into the late 80s in a pure yet contemporary form.

"I'm not a revivalist act. I'm not trying to make an album that sounds like it was recorded in 1954 in terms of sonics and fidelity. You don't have to throw the artistic baby out with the bathwater. To make country music palatable to young people, don't short-sell it. We use modern recording and video techniques, but we maintain the integrity of form. You should use the most modern vehicle available for delivering the art form."

Kerry Doole



Hillbilly Hymns

Raised in a working class family in Kentucky, then Ohio, the young Yoakam breathed in country music the way his grandfather sucked in coal dust.

"I was raised in a strict fundamentalist church — the Church of Christ — and we sang acapella, what I call

Scruggs albums. They'd look at me like I was out of my mind!"

"I always wrote country, except when I had a rockabilly band in high school."

A mid-70s pilgrimage to Nashville, the music's Mecca, disillusioned Dwight, whose music was dismissed as "too country" by record

new country vinyl & tape report

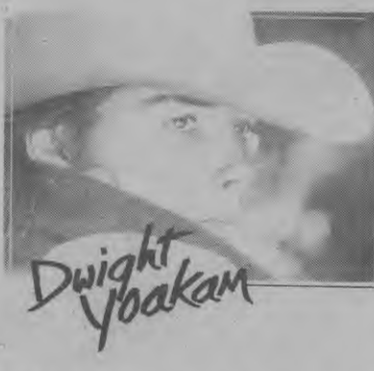
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HANK WILLIAMS Jr.

Montana Cafe

To say that Hank Jr. is smokin' right now is to understate the obvious. Hank wrote all but 3 of the tracks including hit 'Country State of Mind'. Check out his versions of 'You Can't Judge a Book (By Looking at the Cover)' and 'Harvest Moon/St Louis Blues'.



DWIGHT YOAKAM

Guitars, Cadillacs etc

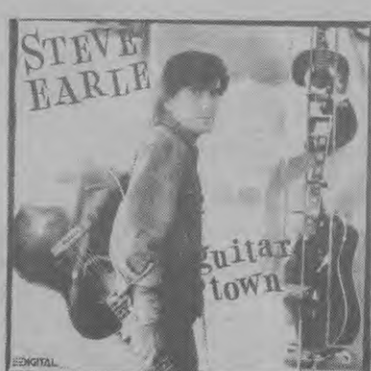
The new name in country music is DWIGHT YOAKAM! After a hot indie record and opening for the Blasters and Los Lobos, this Kentucky born singer/songwriter is "reclaiming territory for country music" with his "revitalised version of honky tonk".



RANDY TRAVIS

Storms of Life

With his deep, expressive voice, North Carolina-native Randy Travis brings new energy to a classic musical style. Includes No. 1 country hit '1825' and 'On the Other Hand'.



STEVE EARLE

Guitar Town

A stunning debut by one of Nashville's original new talents. "Aided by Richard Bennett's simple yet powerful neo-Duane Eddy guitar, Earle's songwriting shines through." (R&R Confidential)



PATSY CLINE

Stop, Look & Listen

A collection of 12 rare tracks spanning Cline's remarkable career — from her first session in 1951 ('Turn the Cards Slowly') to her 1961 re-recording of 'A Poor Man's Roses'.



CRYSTAL GAYLE

Straight to the Heart

A strong return for golden-throated veteran of country music. A fine selection of mostly new material with a no-nonsense production. Highlights include remake of Johnny Ray's 'Cry'.



VARIOUS

Coal Miner's Daughter

The movie soundtrack from the classic bio-pic of the life of Loretta Lynn. Excellent vocal performances by Sissy Spacek, Levon Helm (The Band) and Beverly D'Angelo.



PATSY CLINE

Sweet Dreams Soundtrack

This movie soundtrack features the timeless music and original vocals of the legendary Patsy Cline — 12 tracks from the film starring Jessica Lange as Cline.



GEORGE STRAIT

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Another fine album from one of the stars of country music's new traditionalism. A texan, Strait still resides on his San Marcos ranch. This LP displays the diversity of his style from ballads to swing. "One of the two or three finest country singers of his generation." (Rolling Stone)



COUNTRY RADIO CLASSICS
VOL. 1
VOL. 2
Classic country tracks from the Dot Records archives. Artists include Carl Perkins, George Hamilton IV, Porter Wagoner, Crash Craddock, Margo Smith and Tompall Glaser.