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JUN
07

JUSTIN HAIGH DEBUTS HIS NEW RECORD "PEOPLE LIKE ME"

JUSTIN HAIGH - PEOPLE LIKE ME

WRITTEN BY JOHN WALKER

The primary goal for our site has always been to introduce you to new artists that will hopefully succeed in their own music endeavors. It is a tough business out there, and unfortunately many very talented people never see the light of day, and are forced to give up far before they are ready. With this in mind, please allow me to introduce you to Justin Haigh.

Justin is releasing his debut record, *People Like Me*, for Apache Ranch Records on June 7th. You can tell quite a bit about an artist on their debut release by those whom they have surrounded themselves with, plus the material they have chosen to cover. We have all seen debut artists in the past pull out the classics and attempt to do them justice. That has been met with mixed results. Justin admirably decided to select songs from a few very good song writers, and allow his own musical ability to speak for itself.

Of course Justin has had a long journey to even reach this point, but it is one he has enjoyed very much.

"I started getting paid to play music when I was about 14," states Haigh. "In those days I was playing weekends at the VFW Halls and local bars. I took a hiatus from music, for a few years after high school and went in the military. After leaving the family ranch, I then went on to fishing in Alaska, and eventually after a short try at ranching for myself, I bought a Peterbilt truck and went over the road. I got back into music in 2003 and landed a small deal with a no longer existing indie label in South Dakota. It was through them that I met my current producer, Lew Curatolo, and eventually I landed on Apache Ranch Records. I have toured extensively, playing shows at fairs and private events and doing house gigs from TX, through NM, CO, WY, MT, ND, SD, MN, WI.

As with many new artists, the road has certainly been a roller coaster ride.

"The highs and lows of being out on the road playing gigs would probably have more to do with the receptiveness to what I'm doing. I have played some bars that some people would say were less than elite and had the time of my life. Not because I made a lot of money (because a lot of times I've gone in the hole paying expenses) but because the people were really into the music. People bring the band and I home cooked food, because they know we aren't getting much for home cooked meals on the road, or offer to have us come over for a Sunday dinner. Those are the highs. The lows are long hours on the road between gigs, run down motels, lack of money, and Monday or Tuesday nights when there is no one there. But when you get to the gig and the people are really digging what you do it cancels everything else out."

Throughout these years, Justin has developed a strong interest in all music, but there are a few who have influenced him more than others.

"I love Waylon Jennings music and, even though his style is not the same as mine, I have taken a lot of what I have learned listening to his lyrics and tried to incorporate his wit and his ability to paint a picture with words into my own writing. I respect more than just his writing and performing though. I also can appreciate what he did for the genre in the 1970's, opening doors in the industry for a whole new demographic of country and Americana music lovers. I have so many other favorites that it would be hard to list them all, but right at the top would be Merle Haggard, John Anderson, Gary Stewart, Willie Nelson, and Brad Paisley."

Justin went on to explain his feelings about the music scene today, and how he would like to fit in to it all.

“Let me say, I am a true lover of music in most any genre so its important that anyone reading this knows that I am in no way downgrading or trying to demean any artist or their style. I listen to everything from Hank Sr. to AC/DC to Eminem, and I don't have any problem with telling anyone that. Great music is great music, regardless of genre. What I do have a problem with is the fact that there is a new genre or even several new genres of music that is being pigeon holed as country. Music is a progressive institution. It grows with the times. There has always been a huge pop influence in the Nashville scene. Think of Patsy Cline's huge pop crossover hits. That has remained a part of it. Artists like Ronnie Milsap, Kenny Rogers, and even my hero's Waylon Jennings were all pop crossover artists. But there was something different...they were ALL Country artists who had songs that would hit multiple genres...not the other way around. I think the industry is 180 degrees out from where it was when Waylon, Jessie, Willie, and Tompall came out with “*Wanted: The Outlaws*”. They could not make the industry see that they were missing a HUGE demographic. The powers that be at the time had a pretty good handle on what country music was and who their audience was. The “Outlaws” showed them that they could still do something that was “Country” and reach fans that would otherwise NEVER had listened to country music. They proved it by having the 1st ever platinum selling country album. Right now I think the powers that be have forgotten about their core audience. The people who just want to hear good ol' country music, such as Merle Haggard, Gary Stewart, George Strait, Alan Jackson.”

Justin continued, “I had a conversation recently about the differences in the industry now and back when. It was about how everyone seems to want to copy whatever is working for someone else. I think that is a lot of the problem. What made George Jones, Waylon Jennings, Keith Whitley, Johnny Cash, Merle Haggard, Willie Nelson, Bobby Bare, Tom T. Hall, John Connelly, Loretta Lynn, Dolly Parton, Earl Thomas Conley, Conway Twitty (the list goes on forever) GREAT instead of just good was the fact that they were individuals as artists. They were entirely different from anyone else. They were doing their thing...their way. You could hear each of them do the same song and you would walk away with an entirely different perspective on the story from each one. That is greatness.”

When asked how he seen himself fitting into the current music scene, Justin commented, “My goal is to turn the perspective around a little. My album and especially my first national single from the album (*All My Best Friends*) is very, very country. I have gotten great response...even from people who don't like country music. I have written some songs that would make pretty good crossover songs, but in my opinion they are still country. I want to always be considered a country artist.”

This record is pure country, from start to finish. Among the 12 songs included here, 3 were written by Texas' own Kevin Higgins. *Monahans*, *In Jail*, and *Gathering Dust* each are exemplary songs that Justin does a great job making his own. You can listen to virtually any one of these songs and from these alone know you are hearing something very special. Justin's vocal presence is strong and refreshing, allowing the lyrics to flow providing the listener with a magical journey. Many artists can take good material and make it sound plain by going through the motions. Justin has taken good material, and made it shine even brighter.

Justin stated, “The first time I heard *Gathering Dust* was in 2005. It was the title track of the 2006 Texas Music Awards Album of The Year by The Dust Devils. My producer, Lew Curatolo, also produced that record. I instantly fell in love with the song. I think Kevin Higgins of The Dust Devils is one of the best songwriters in a state FULL of world class songwriters,” stated Justin. “Putting that song at the end of the record was just a no brainer for me, sort of like dessert after a healthy helping of other great songs. *In Jail* along with *Monahans* are songs I have done in the past and both have always resonated with me as well. They are just very clever songs by a great songwriter.”

Justin also does an outstanding job covering Waylon Jennings' *Rose In Paradise*. When I first seen this song listed, I was a bit apprehensive. As I stated previously, attempting to cover classic artists is very tricky if you are trying to make a name for yourself, and many fail to even do the song justice. However, Justin's vocal passion shines here in a song that calls for nothing less than your best.

“*Rose In Paradise* was Waylon's last number one...I believe 1987” states Haigh. “I have always loved the song. I was doing it in my shows quite a bit and my producer and some folks from the label were there. Lew Curatolo, (my producer) heard the way we were doing it and was blown away. He is also a huge fan of Waylon. So we hit the studio and the rest was history. I am glad we included it here.”

Justin also displays an innately keen ability to lay down a ballad with precision and class. The two that stand out here are *The Leaving In Your Eyes*, written by Jeff Posey and John Greenberg, along with *I Ain't Leavin'*, written by Mary Gauthier and Travis Meadows. With each song you can hear the passion from Justin that truly drives a ballad home.

"*The Leaving In Your Eyes* was written by Jeff Poesy and John Greenberg," states Haigh. "John sent this song over to us about a year ago. He had done a bit of collaborating with my label mate John Arthur Martinez's album "Purgatory Road". I instantly liked the song. It was dark and had a sense of urgency to it. The story is not unlike "The Highwayman", in that it jumps from one instance to another. I think it would also work well if done with 1, 2, or even 3 more singers. Maybe someday I can do something like that.

He continued, "*I Ain't Leavin'...* written by Travis Meadows and Mary Gauthier was one of the 1st songs we had pitched to us. Like I said earlier you want to do songs that fit where you are in your life and it was perfect. I was at a point in my life where I was gone on the road about 300 days a year and hardly had time for family. I needed a way to let them know that I love them, but I was serious about what I was doing as well. The person in the song was singing about growing up and not running anymore and that was just where I was."

The initial single from the record *All My Best Friends (Are Behind Bars)*, written by Justin, has already been met with deserved high acclaim. Justin has also put together a video for this song as well. You can watch it here:

<http://justinhaigh.com/>

Among other writers Justin has covered here, the list includes Bobby Pinson and Jamey Johnson. So you know the material chosen here is definitely first class all the way.

Honestly, this is one of the best debut country records I have heard for quite sometime. I came away equally impressed with the person after having the opportunity to ask him a few questions. Country music needs more artists like this man, and his music as well. He summed it up very well at the end of our conversation...a testament I wish more artists held highly today...

"I think if a person is true to what they are doing and they are gaining a following, no matter what size, that following is their recognition...and no amount of money could beat the feeling of recognition you get from real fans."

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