

## DWIGHT YOAKAM

Few entertainers have attained the iconic status of Dwight Yoakam. Perhaps that is because so few have consistently and repeatedly met the high standard of excellence delivered by the Kentucky native no matter what his endeavor. His name immediately conjures up compelling, provocative images: A pale cowboy hat with the brim pulled low; poured-on blue jeans; intricate, catchy melodies paired with poignant, brilliant lyrics that mesmerize with their indelible imprint. Then there's Yoakam the actor, who seemingly melts into his roles, impressively standing toe-to-toe with some of the world's top thespians: Jodie Foster, Tommy Lee Jones, Forest Whitaker, Nicholas Cage. Add to that Yoakam the entrepreneur and you have a singular talent without peer.

Is it any wonder that Time Magazine dubbed Yoakam "A Renaissance Man?" But that's getting ahead of the story.

Much has been made that the Kentucky-born, Ohio-raised Yoakam was too country for Nashville when he first sought out his musical fortune in the mid-80s, but the truth is his music has always been too unique, too ruggedly individualistic to fit neatly into any one box. Like the icons he so admires -- Elvis, Merle, Buck-- Yoakam is one of a kind. He has taken his influences and filtered them into his own potent blend of country and rock that honors his forbearers and yet creates something beautifully new. As Vanity Fair declared, "Yoakam strides the divide between rock's lust and country's lament."

The long-time Los Angeleno has sold more than 25 million albums worldwide, placing him in an elite cadre of global superstars. Yet the sales have never come at the expense of his musical integrity. Whether singing about the twisted wreckage of romance or broken dreams of this hard life, Yoakam brings a knowing, glorious edge to his delivery and stands, in a world of artifice and flash, as a beacon of authenticity. He has 12 gold albums and 9 platinum or multi-platinum albums, including the triple platinum "This Time". Five of those albums have topped Billboard's Country Albums chart with another seven landing in the Top 10. More than 30 singles have charted, with eighteen going top 20, including the incomparable hits "Honky Tonk Man," "Please Please Baby," "Little Ways," "I Sang Dixie," "It Only Hurts When I Cry," "Fast as You" and "Thousand Miles from Nowhere." He's won two Grammys and earned a staggering 21 nominations.

His debut album, "Guitars, Cadillacs, Etc., Etc.," had critics and fans alike taking notice, heralding a new voice that arrived fully formed with no contemporary rival. With those 10 songs, full of twang and truth, Yoakam led the New Traditionalist movement. From the start, it was clear this jaded, often inscrutable troubadour could put a voice to our thoughts, expressing them better than we ever could.

Over the next several albums, Yoakam morphed from talented newcomer to musical legend. With "Hillbilly Deluxe," People's Ralph Novak aptly praised Yoakam for his "uncluttered natural style, with a little rockabilly sob in his voice that harks back to Hank Williams."

Indeed, as his artistry continued to develop—through such albums as "Buenas Noches from a Lonely Room" and "This Time"—Yoakam progressed on a singular path. No less than the Washington Post's Jon Podhoretz declared Yoakam "as serious a country performer as there is today." Furthermore declaring him, "the best songwriter going." The New York Times' Peter Watrous confirmed Yoakam's much broader role as the eyes of this country: "He fits into a general cultural reinvestigation of things American, including jazz and grassroots rock-and-roll." Fellow New York Times scribe Jon Pareles compared Yoakam to one of his heroes: "Like Presley, he doesn't always stay within musical genres; even more important, he makes sure a song's conflicting emotions all come through. His breakup songs are blue and lovelorn, but angry, too; his rambling-guy songs are footloose but regretful; his come-ons are both seductive and menacing."

As stellar as his recordings are, his live performances are transcendent (check out 1995's "Dwight Live"). Upon his appearance at the Kentucky State Fair in 2006, the Louisville Courier Journal's Marty Rosen declared that "in his best moments, Dwight Yoakam ranks with the scant handful of country singers (or, more accurately, singers in any genre, from opera to blues) who can legitimately be called geniuses."

So broad is his appeal that he was the only artist to appear this year at both indie rock extravaganza Coachella and at country music festival Stagecoach. His performances, as always, drew rapturous acclaim from critics: "I haven't yet encountered another devoted love fest like the one Yoakam got this weekend," wrote August Brown in the Los Angeles Times this spring. "Every alt-kid, rockabilly survivor, Latina hot-rod and the rest of Stagecoach's misfits all came under this tent to pay rowdy respect to a singer-songwriter who's done as much as any to keep the fangs in modern pop-inclined country."

Yoakam also recently headlined the last night of the CMA Festival in Nashville, marking his first appearance at the event in two decades. The potency of his performances makes him a much in-demand guest on the television circuit. So much so that he holds the record for the most performances by any musical artist on the top-ranked "The Tonight Show with Jay Leno". But the music only tells part of the story. Over the last 15 years, Yoakam has carved out a niche as one of the top character actors on film.

Starting with a role as a truck driver in John Dahl's spicy film noir "Red Rock West" in 1992, Yoakam was an instantly mesmerizing presence on the big screen. However, nothing prepared viewers for his riveting appearance as the malevolent Doyle Hargraves in the Academy Award winning film "Sling Blade," for which he and his co-stars were also nominated for the Screen Actors Guild's award for outstanding performance by a cast. In David Fincher's box office hit "Panic Room," as the brilliantly underplayed antagonist Raoul, Yoakam once again seamlessly shapeshifted in front of our eyes. As David Smith for the BBC wrote, "...the film is stolen by Yoakam." His performance in Tommy Lee Jones' Cannes Film Festival award-winning "The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada" was effusively praised for its penetrating honesty. Entertainment Weekly's Sean Smith told USA Today, "As a character actor, he disappears into his roles. There's something amazingly natural about what he does. All his characters have this tense undertone to them."

Yet just when Yoakam appears to get pigeonholed, he deftly transcends categorization. This holiday season he'll once again display his vast range when he plays the hilarious Pastor Phil alongside Reese Witherspoon and Vince Vaughn in the broad comedy romp, "Four Christmases." He then returns to action when he reprises his role as the infectiously eccentric Doc Miles with Jason Stratham in "Crank 2: High Voltage," the sequel to the 2006 smash "Crank."

There is Yoakam the artist, and then there's Yoakam the entrepreneur. In typical Yoakam fashion, even his endeavors that start out as a genial gesture at a friend's behest somehow turn into a brilliant move. In the mid-90s, Buck Owens repeatedly joked with Yoakam about creating something special for the opening of Owens' Crystal Palace club and museum. In typical tongue-and-cheek fashion, Yoakam created a fictitious brand of biscuits to be served to mark the occasion, dubbed Dwight Yoakam's Bakersfield Biscuits. Once again, Yoakam's creative instincts led to something lasting. The initially imaginary Bakersfield Biscuit and Dry Goods Company has evolved into a successful national brand with dozens of products in stores across the country.

At the core of Yoakam's creative expression, whether it is musical, theatrical or entrepreneurial, is an unwavering desire to articulate human connection. The thread that ties it all together continues to be Yoakam himself, and his devotion to discovery. But we'll let Yoakam have the final word. As he told Newsweek, "I'm committed to an earnest exploration of life, no matter what medium I'm using."