

SHAWN PITTMAN – GOING DOWN THE HARD ROAD

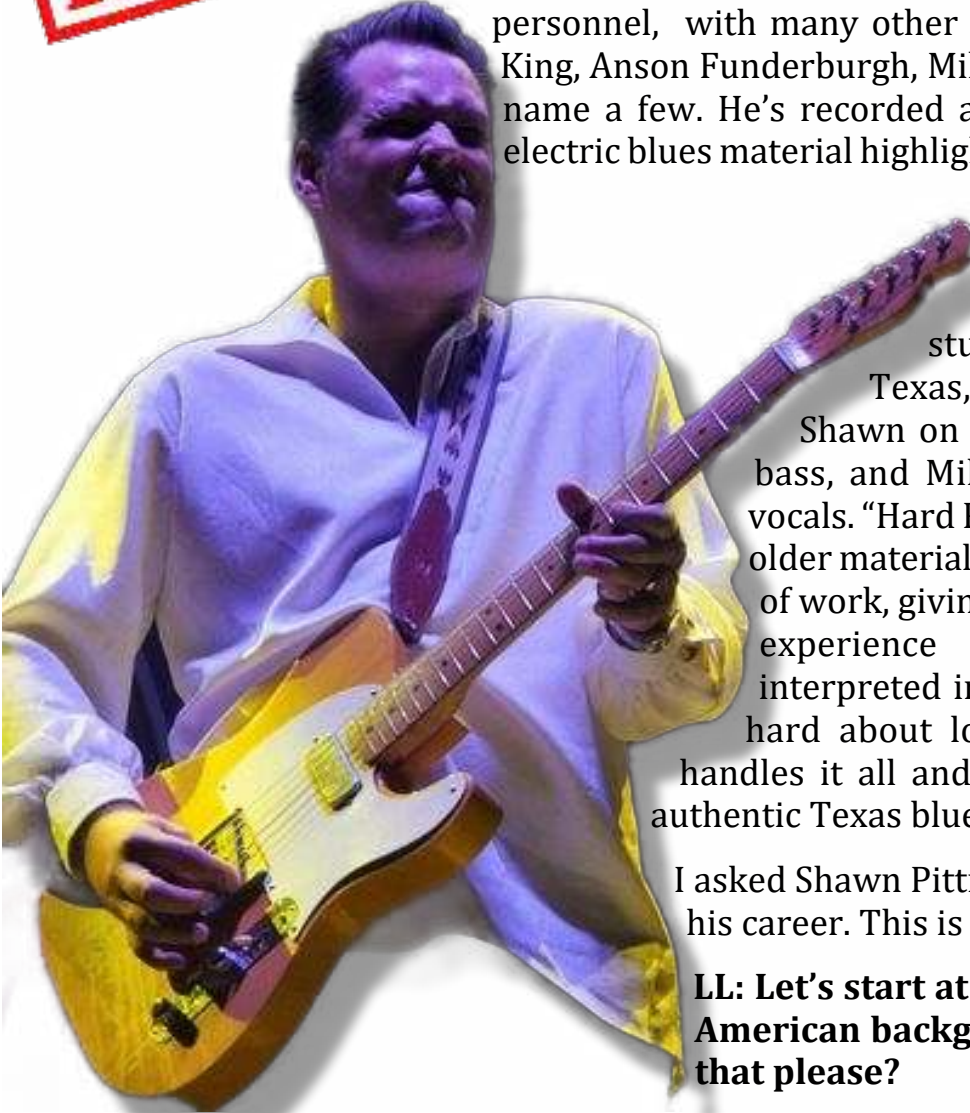
By Lawrence Lebo



SPECIAL REPORT

Texas blues guitarist/singer and Native American Shawn Pittman has 15 releases under his belt and has made it through some of his toughest times. Born in a Choctaw hospital in Oklahoma, Pittman migrated to Texas as a teen. It was there that Shawn soaked up that particular style of blues rock that seeps out of the bars in Dallas and Austin.

To date, Shawn has appeared, as either an artist or as side personnel, with many other notable blues artists such as B.B. King, Anson Funderburgh, Mike Morgan and Susan Tedeschi, to name a few. He's recorded and performed both acoustic and electric blues material highlighting his own brand of Texas roots and blues.



Shawn's raw new release titled "Hard Road" was recorded live in studio (no overdubs) in Austin, Texas, with his new trio consisting of Shawn on guitar and vocals, Jason Crisp on bass, and Mike King on drums and harmony vocals. "Hard Road" mixes both new original and older material from Pittman's considerable body of work, giving Shawn's fans the opportunity to experience his repertoire laid bare and interpreted in the trio setting. There's nothing hard about loving this album! The tight trio handles it all and delivers a high energy, fun and authentic Texas blues good-rockin' time!

I asked Shawn Pittman to tell me about his roots and his career. This is what he told me

LL: Let's start at the beginning. You have Native American background! Would you tell us about that please?

SP: My mother's side of the family is where the Native American blood comes from. I was born in a Choctaw hospital and at that time it was the capital of the Choctaw Nation in Talihina, Oklahoma (the capital has moved to Durant now). My great, great grandfather Charles James was allotted land in Idabel, Oklahoma as part of The Dawes Act in 1887, 120 acres of land parcelled to tribal members. My Grandfather was half and he exposed me to some of the culture and taught me some words in Choctaw. He was also the first person to have a guitar in the family and he played a little bit. He showed me a few basic chords.

LL: I understand you grew up in a musical family. Who played what, and what music genres and artists did they expose you too?

SP: My first music exposure was from my Grandparents Burnett and Juanita James. Granny (we called her) played a mean boogie-woogie piano, and I would be in awe of that as a little kid. My mom played piano and sang, and we all took piano lessons as little kids. My brother got a drum set when I was about in 4th grade, and he turned me on to some music too. So, I had plenty of opportunities to try out multiple instruments. My dad was listening to Buddy Holly records, and I could dig through my mom's 45's and got a musical history from their generation.



LL: You play several different instruments. Tell us what drew you to the guitar and about your musical education please?

SP: My childhood friend brought over his guitar one day and my brother had gone off to college by then and left his drum set at home. I was about 14 and could keep a beat while my buddy played Chuck Berry. As soon as we started jamming, I was obsessed with the electric guitar. So I borrowed one of his guitars and picked up what I could. Over the years, I got exposed to harmonica and learned a few tricks from guys like Darrell Nullish, Brian 'Hash Brown' Calway, and Bob Corritore. Same on drums, bass and piano. Whenever I play with all these great players, I ask them for tips and tricks on all instruments. Just being around them and seeing them do what they do helped me in other instruments. So I have for a long time been making my demos by playing everything. I did a record like that with Delta Groove called 'Edge of the World'.

LL: Why did you gravitate to the blues?

SP: Something about blues just felt at home with me. The groove, the notes, the country slang, just seemed to remind me of family. It touched me in a way that felt very personal, and I understood it somehow. It was like I

had found a treasure, so I just started getting my hands on all the blues I could get, piano and guitar.

LL: Your family converted to and raised you in the Mormon faith. Folks tend to have a lot of preconceived notions about Mormons, especially if their only experience of them is through TV shows and Broadway plays. How has your Mormon upbringing affected your career as a blues artist?

SP: Well, that upbringing gave me some good core values. The Mormons are Christian, and they only have one wife these days (haha!). Something a lot of people don't know is that the religion was translated off of records written by ancient inhabitants on the American Continent about the coming of Christ. It's a very deep and personal thing but has given me some insight into the spirit world and things beyond this earth. That being said, I am not active at the moment.

Sometimes the lifestyle of a blues musician doesn't seem to jive too well with being a Mormon and it has been somewhat of a struggle. But the people in the church have always supported me and have been my biggest source of encouragement throughout the years, even when I struggle. I have met very nice people through the church. No one has ever said that I couldn't do both, be a blues musician and a Mormon. Hard to do!

LL: What about the details of your career path! You started like most players, as local side personnel in many different bands and backing different artists. What motivated you to step out and pursue your own artist career and how has that unfolded?

SP: I started out as a side guy and enjoyed it. It was a goal of mine to be able to sing and I just went for it. I still consider myself a guitarist first, but I played with some good singers that I learned from as well and who they listened to. People like Bobby Bland, Otis Rush, OV Wright and even Jimmy Reed. So, naturally I wanted to play the music that I was listening to and all my heroes sang. I knew it would be a good mover for the future if I wanted to be self-reliant as well.



LL: At one point you went back to traditional academia and earned a degree in Information Technology. Why did you decide to do that, and does what you learned now support your musical career?

SP: I was married for ten years and a practicing Mormon, when my deal with Delta Groove kind of fizzled, I promised my wife I would leave music and try to be a regular guy. So, I went back to school and got an associate degree in IT. I basically just ended up in call centres or the warehouse and it just wasn't me. I learned some stuff about how wireless networking and protocols work, but figured I was just as good off

playing music, so I went back.

LL: So, you dated and played guitar with Susan Tedeschi before she was married to Derek Trucks! We'd love to hear all about that please!!!

SP: It was a long time ago, and really occupied only about a year and a half or so between 98-2000. She was a great singer with a hit record, and I was enamoured with her. I opened some shows for her and toured as a sideman for a bit, but in the end, it just wasn't my thing. I wanted to do my own thing and earn my own way, whether it be success or failure.

LL: Let's talk about your latest release titled "Hard Road". Tell us about the title, and your concept and vision for the album please?

SP: I just wanted to start over. I moved back to Dallas after the pandemic and put a band together. A trio where the bass player (Jason Crisp) plays bass and guitar switching off. We can do the power trio as well as the Hound Dog Taylor type of raw blues and rock n roll. I wanted to capture how this trio sounds and went in the studio and recorded it live. Two days in the studio was all I could afford and came out with "Hard Road". I titled it that because it's true. Anybody that has dedicated their life to blues knows it's a tough road and not an easy way to make a living.

LL: Please talk about the musicians who contributed to “Hard Road” and how you connected with them.



SP: Jason Crisp, bass player and guitar I have known for thirty years, and we have played together in different iterations of my band. We both like some of the same kinds of music and our philosophy is similar, we both like raw, tough sounding blues. Jason also contributes some of the writing on songs like ‘Keep Pushin’. Jason has played with a lot of great Texas artists like Omar and the Howlers, The Moeller Bros, and Lou Ann Barton. He now lives in Austin.

Mike King is the drummer and does some harmony vocals as well. Mike is from McKinney, and I met him at a local jam about a year and a half ago. He also plays guitar, and he was already playing around town when I moved back. I liked his style of playing and we started working together.

LL: How has the global pandemic affected your career and how have you navigated through it?

SP: Trying to revive a career is always hard and the pandemic

did not help. I lost a lot of gigs and places went out of business. I learned the value of social media a lot more and utilized streaming to make a little bit of money from home. It’s been difficult to get started again with festivals in the USA and EU just because of the backlog of artists that got postponed, but I think it’s coming back strong.

LL: What can your fans look forward to coming up for you?

SP: I am already laying down demos for another record. I might add some pieces for the next recording and make a little more of a production out of it. I will always lay down my kind of blues and as well as try to write my own songs. I will always be making music and I hope I continue to grow as an artist and keep getting better. I’m looking to solidify my place as one of the artists people that like raw and exciting blues turn to. Hopefully more people get turned on to it and I can show people what I can do on a big stage.

~ © Lawrence Lebo 2023

Lawrence Lebo is an award winning, critically acclaimed Blues recording artist living in Los Angeles, CA, USA. She can be found on the web at www.lawrencelebo.com