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Rock And Blues International



**SHAWN
PITTMAN**

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE
Groove City &
Daria Biancardi
Jools Holland
Madonna
Blake Rose
Night Cobra
Blondie
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Meet Shawn Pittman

Texas Bluesman Makes His Mark On The Lone Star State

By Kevin Wildman

Being a musician isn't the easiest job on this planet. It comes with its ups and downs, the good and the bad. There are always obstacles to overcome, especially in this new era of Covid. It's made touring and recording problematic, and it hasn't really let up that much. However, there are some musicians out there that have battled this and more to come back swinging and taking control of their own destiny. One such musician is Bluesman Shawn Pittman. Shawn has his own story to tell as he has slipped in and out of the music business several times, always returning stronger than when he left.

The Oklahoma native likes to call Texas his home as he has found a lot of his musical roots here. Born in Oklahoma, Pittman first moved to Texas in the early 90s. Little did he know that when he was taking piano lessons at the age of 8 that he would go on to becoming a top notch guitarist and make the Blues his way of life. At one point in his early youth, young Shawn discovered his brother's drum set and started sneaking into his room to try his hand at that, but by the age of 14 all that changed when he discovered a love for the guitar. Soon he was introduced to a particular kind of music by his good friend from high school, Bracken Hale. Bracken turned him on to the sounds of Muddy Waters and Lightnin' Hopkins, just to name a couple. Soon Shawn discovered a love for the Blues that continues to this day. Another friend, Ben Bigsby further enhanced Pittman's thirst for the Blues with songs from Jimmy Reed, Elmore James, and Albert King and advised him that his next step besides playing guitar was to also learn to sing. A

good Bluesman not only plays guitar, but he also sings as well.

By 1992 Shawn had become a Dallas transplant and spent seven years there honing his skill and performing around Dallas as well as other parts of Texas until 1999. From there he moved to the music capital of Texas, Austin. He spent a good 14 years there furthering his career and making a name for himself around the Lone Star State, eventually moving back to Oklahoma where his family was around 2013. During that time he also returned to school to earn a degree in Information Technology. By that time he had about 10 albums under his belt and had found himself in and out of the music business a couple of times. When 2015 rolled around, Shawn was back recording again and released his 11th album, *Backslidin' Again*, followed by his 12th release in 2018, *Everyone Wants To Know* with his longtime friend and drummer Jay Moeller. Pittman's most recent releases are *Make It Right*, which was released in 2020 in partnership with the Netherlands-based Continental Record Services (CRS) and 2021's all acoustic solo album, *Stompin' Solo*.

2021 also finds Shawn relocating from Oklahoma back to his old stomping grounds in Dallas' Oak Cliff area where Stevie Ray and Jimmie Vaughan grew up. Now Shawn is starting back up again with a new attitude and a new goal. He's definitely going to make the music business work in his favor. In November of this year he plans on recording a new album in Austin at Wire Recording with owner and engineer Stuart Sullivan at the helm. Pittman has worked with Sullivan

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before and know that he will get the best out of Shawn on these recordings. Recording and touring with Pittman on these new recordings will be longtime friend and bandmate, Jason Crisp. Rounding out the rhythm section will be drummer Mike King.

Recently we had a chance to sit down with Shawn and discuss the ups and downs, as well as the new album and the road along the way.

Rock And Blues International: Before we get too buried in this conversation Shawn, what is Information Technology and what did you get out of it? Is it something that is going to help out with your career in Music?

Shawn Pittman: It's the broadest version of nothing that you can study that won't get you any job. It'll land you in a call center, but that's about it. When I went to community college that's the major that I took and I asked the teacher one day, 'what is this exactly'. He said, 'you're taking the Information Technology... We've been trying to get that one.' So evidently, I took one that is a little bit of everything, and not enough of anything. It's a little bit of networking... a little bit of everything that we do with computers, but it was just an Associates in Applied Science, so it really wasn't something that was going to help me enough. That's why I'm playing (music) again.

Rock And Blues International: Well, I figured that what you learned out of Information Technology was that you needed to go back and play music to really satisfy yourself and make yourself happy and productive.

Shawn Pittman: Pretty much (laughs). But you know, anytime I've ever.... Like, there's been many times over the years where I had to stop playing for one reason or another. It's usually been my mental health, my spiritual health, and my financial health. A lot of times, when the financial health goes, the other two seem to follow, so I have had to get some other jobs from time to time and I've always used what I learned to go back to music. It always makes me more excited when I do go back to music because I feel I learned a life skill or tool that can help me. The thing with the I.T. stuff is that it helped me because I learned a little bit about how computers work and now I manage my own website. I just do it for myself. It helps me to save some money and not hire a web guy.

Rock And Blues International: I can relate to that. I handle my own website myself. I wish I could hire one of these professionals to do it for me, but it's just more convenient and cost effective to manage it myself.

Shawn Pittman: Yeah, it's so expensive,

Rock And Blues International: You've really had a fantastic career so far and have worked with a 'who's who' of



great Texas musicians.

Shawn Pittman: Yeah, but sometimes it doesn't really seem to help me very much when it comes to talent buyers. I don't know if they don't take the time to look me up and a lot of people don't take the time to, but I'm basically starting from scratch. They're kind of like, 'who are you.' I can tell them who I've played with, but they're more concerned with how many people I can bring into the bar. I've had to deal with some of that. I'm pretty much starting over and I'm 47 years old. It seems like I've been pretty much saying the same thing forever, because I seem to hear, 'how come we've never heard of you.' (laughs again) Yeah, I have played with a lot of famous Texas musicians. That's something you can't really put a price value on or anything like that.

Rock And Blues International: You really have worked with a lot of famous Texas musicians. Let's name a few here... Preston Hubbard from The Fabulous Thunderbirds, Tommy Shannon from Stevie Ray Vaughan's band as well as from Johnny Winter, The Bramhall Brothers... Doyle Bramhall II was just out on the road with Eric Clapton this year. From Dallas you played with Mike Morgan from Mike Morgan and

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The Crawl. If you're from Texas, you've heard of Mike Morgan. You've also performed with Cricket Taylor, another familiar Texas artist. When it comes to Texas musicians, this is the cream of the crop.

Shawn Pittman: I think so. This is why I came down here to begin with. I wanted to learn how to play with those folks. I've also played with Anson Funderburgh. I've played a lot with Mike Morgan, especially being based in Dallas. He's going to be with me on the next gig coming up this Friday in Dallas as a special guest. We did a gig with me, Anson, and Mike called 'The Texas Blues Guitar Summit'. We did real good. We did real well there in Dallas. I don't put it on my bio because people always ask me about it and I don't like talking about it too much. I did play with Susan Tedeschi as well back in 1999. At the time she was up for The Grammy for her second album, *Just Won't Burn*. I don't put it on there, because I didn't really play with her all that long. I got to open up for BB King down in Houston at the House Of Blues. That was pretty cool. I opened up for a lot of folks. I got to play with a lot of my heroes. I can think back on those times and it keeps me going.

Rock And Blues International: Being in the music business is a hard gig, no matter what aspect you take, performing, writing, recording, even doing a music publication. It's definitely not for the faint of heart. It's a very demanding profession. Not everybody has the success of Elton John, Eric Clapton, or even BB King. Even they have had tough moments.

Shawn Pittman: I can relate to that. There's always someone telling them that they're not doing enough. Even if it were Gary Clark Jr., I would imagine he's got pressure on him from someone too. It's really hard. You can do it as long as you can do it and then when it's not fun, you just have to stop for awhile. Sometimes I've had too. If you're not having fun doing it, then you're just kind of wasting your time and everybody else's. If you can manage to do the work and have fun doing it, then heck, I can't imagine why I'd ever stop. Hopefully this time around, I plan on sticking around as long as I can and making it happen one way or another. I know there's some level of success out there waiting for me. I'm just going to keep working for it and have fun while I'm doing it.

Rock And Blues International: That's right, you just can't give up. It's a very fickle business. They say you're only as good as your last album. It's the same with my magazine. I'm only as good as the last issue of my magazine. 'Well Kevin, that last issue sucked.... What are you going to do with the next one?'

Shawn Pittman: Oh yeah, I certainly understand all that. A lot of people haven't heard any of my records, and I've recorded a lot of records. Some of them I've just self-released.



I just keep doing them. I get knocked down and I slowly get back up. You've got to keep yourself motivated.

Rock And Blues International: Well, when you get into the Music business, you've just got to keep yourself happy. That's the main thing.

Shawn Pittman: Right!

Rock And Blues International: If you're happy, it will reflect on what you're doing. If you're miserable with it, that will reflect on it too.

Shawn Pittman: Yeah! Exactly. That's why whenever I realize, 'okay, the way I'm doing this, I'm not having that much fun, so I'd better stop', because you never want to be in front of people and entertain them when you're miserable. I've had times where I just had to stop playing just for my own well being. I had to figure out why I wasn't having fun and reflect on it, learn from it, and then when I was ready to come back again, take that knowledge and do it differently.

Rock And Blues International: When was your last album?

Shawn Pittman: I stopped doing records between 2014 and 2017, then I did one in 2018 with my friend Jay Moeller and it went out on a German label. No one around here really
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heard it. Then I did another one in 2019. I did that one in Denmark and that one went out on a label from Holland. Then the pandemic hit, so I really didn't get to tour behind that. And then in 2020 I was in Oklahoma and I did an acoustic album, so that was my latest. It was just acoustic because I couldn't play with anybody because of the pandemic. So, I've done albums in '18, '19', and '20. Those are kind of the circumstances there.

Rock And Blues International: I listened to your last two albums, the acoustic one and the electric one and I really enjoyed them. The acoustic one was very traditional sounding.

Shawn Pittman: Thank you, I used the pandemic to learn how to play by myself without a band, because I didn't know when things were going to open up again. It forced me to study some guys like Lightnin' Hopkins and Mance Lipscomb, two of my favorites and I've always enjoyed playing acoustic, but I wanted to challenge myself to go into the studio and record a full acoustic record. People have been giving me some good feedback on it.

Rock And Blues International: Well, when you perform a solo acoustic show, at the end of the night it's a lot easier to divide up the money.

Shawn Pittman: Amen to that!

Rock And Blues International: Some of these solo acoustic musicians make far more money than if they had been in a band with four other guys.

Shawn Pittman: That's true.

Rock And Blues International: But I really did enjoy both albums immensely, the electric one and the acoustic one, and I understand that now you are working on a new one.

Shawn Pittman: I am. In November of this year I'm going to go into a studio in Austin for a few days and I'm using the band that I have now. I came back to Dallas in April of this year and I wanted to start over from scratch, and do it just like I did it in the old days. The way everybody used to do, get a band together and play and record with the same guys that I use at every gig and go through the good and the bad together. I've got a good group of guys. It's the same trio. I just play with a bass player and a drummer, and I plan on recording that way as well, just kind of making it a honest, live recording, just getting that sound back out there. It's pretty much a grassroots project from the ground up. I'm hoping to get it done by the end of the year and then I can use that as my most updated release to pitch to festivals and things like that for next Spring and Summer.

Rock And Blues International: Are very many of the songs written already.



Shawn Pittman: Oh yeah! I've never booked studio time until I've had my material ready, so we're good. We've played the songs a bit, but yeah. Some of the songs I'm re-recording because on some of those other releases, they're basically demos, because nobody ever heard them. I think there's good songs on a lot of those, so there's some that I'm re-recording because I never felt they really got heard. It's all original material. I might throw a cover on there, but I haven't decided on that one yet. Right now I'm planning on putting around 11 or 12 songs on there of original material. It's got that Texas sound. It's kind of what I do, that three-piece power trio sound, but I'm marginally traditional. I'm not heavy on the rock side of things. I look at myself as a Blues player that can play Rock and Roll, rather than a guy that started out started out as a Rock and Roll player and later decided he wanted to play Blues. Some people might not understand that, but I'm more traditional in some ways.

Rock And Blues International: I understand that perfectly. You can tell the people that were raised on Blues from the people that are just trying to imitate it.

Shawn Pittman: Yeah, you can hear their influences when they really start playing. That's why I think I still had a place
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in the music universe. I felt that there was some kind of music that I had inside of me there's a place for. I keep coming back. Even when I try to quit, it keeps calling me.... It keeps calling me back, so I don't think I could quite even if I wanted to.

Rock And Blues International: Well, you're acoustic album was a dead giveaway on your influences. There's no way to hide it. Obviously you weren't influenced by Led Zeppelin first.

Shawn Pittman: (Laughs) Well I do like them, I admire their stuff.

Rock And Blues International: Right, but I'm listening to the stuff you're doing on the acoustic album, and it's very traditional Blues sounding. It doesn't sound like you started out as a heavy metal guitarist and then switched to the Blues. You're definitely a Blues guitarist. The feeling is there, the chord structure is there, and every thing is just there and in place. It's a dead giveaway.

Shawn Pittman: Well, I appreciate that. It's a compliment. Yeah, I still study those guys. A lot of people cross over. They look at it like it's too simple and too old or whatever. I just still enjoy it. I can play along with a Jimmy Reed record or a Lightnin' Hopkins record or Eddie Taylor record, any of those guys... Muddy Waters, Jimmy Rogers. I enjoy that still and I still feel I have a lot to learn from those things. I'll probably never stop learning from them. I'm proud of that. It bugs me a little bit when I see some players overlook those guys because it's fundamental.

Rock And Blues International: When you perform one of your shows, what can we expect to see and hear from you and the band?

Shawn Pittman: Well, I'll be playing electric with my bass player and drummer. One interesting thing about what we do is that my bass player also plays guitar. When we do the trio and he's on bass, we can do the traditional Texas Blues sounds, for lack of a good word, would be that Anson Funderburgh Blues or that T-Birds Blues... that Lightnin' Hopkins kind of stuff. And then I have some things that are more in the Soul type of arena as well. And then when the bass player switches to guitar, it enables me to do a lot of Junior Kimbrough or an R.L Burnside type of Blues... a Hound Dog Taylor or a Mississippi Blues kind of sound, or even a Chicago Blues. We can do an Elmore James kind of sound as well. So you get a lot of the different kind of styles of Blues. There are so many cool styles of Blues, so I pride myself in being able to do the ones that I attempt as correctly as possible. We'll play a Bobby Blue Bland song and then we'll play a Hound Dog Taylor song, or Elmore James, so you get a lot of the different styles as well as some Rock and Roll. At least, what I call Rock and Roll... that Chuck Berry kind of grooves and things

like that. Yeah, you can hear lots of different kinds of styles. Some of the feedback I've been getting is that people really like that we go through many different style of Blues.

Rock And Blues International: How much of your sets is original, and for lack of a better term, how much will be cover material. I know you dedicate a fair amount of your performance to some of the Blues traditionalists.

Shawn Pittman: Well, I've written so many songs, that I forget to do them all some of the times. Sometimes I just play a song that I like. Really, it's about fifty-fifty. It kind of depends on the night. If I wanted to, I could play a whole night of original music. I like Jerry McCain a lot. I'll throw in some of his stuff... Lightnin' Hopkins, Elmore James, and Jimmy Reed. I've written a lot of songs, so it kind of depends on the night. You'll get a little bit of both, original and covers. I think mostly 75 percent original and 25 percent cover.

Rock And Blues International: Are there any songs in particular that you feel that you have to include in just about every performance that you do? Are there some favorites that you just have to play because you love performing them?

Shawn Pittman: Yeah, I love that old Jerry McCain stuff. He's got this song called "Next Door Neighbor" that I just love. It's fun to perform and it's a funny song. He's also got one called "Turn Your Damper Down" that's got this raw type of rhythm guitar. I love it, so I'll always throw that in there. As far as my own songs, there's a few that I always perform, and one of them is "Something's Got To Give." That's one of mine. I always start with "Almost Good." That's an original tune that I wrote with a friend of mine that's actually from Houston. He grew up with Billy Gibbons from ZZ Top... across the street or in the same neighborhood. He ended up becoming a lawyer. Don't hold it against him (laughs). He's a partner with Dick DeGuerin, I guess. His name is Lewis Dickson. He's a good friend and a patron. He would tell me stories about him and Billy in High School and some of the jokes they would tell each other, some of the slang they used and stuff. He sent me some lyrics and "Almost Good" is one of them. He's been a big part of my songwriting, so I include a lot of his stuff. There's one song that I do that's called "Lean and Low". Evidently BB King went over to Billy's house one day and while he was there he saw a big, emerald green Cadillac. I wrote a song about that and it's called "Lean and Low." He said that's what they called those big Cadillac's back then, lean and low. He said every time he walked by Billy in school and asked him how he was doing, Billy replied, "Just trying to maintain." So I figured the Houston aspect to that song was an interesting one. It's a big part of what I do, as far as Louis and I have written a lot of songs together. He lives in Austin now.

Rock And Blues International: What kind of an image do you think you project on stage?

Shawn Pittman: You know what, I just try to be myself. I'm pretty much just a regular guy. I don't know as far as image goes... just fun, a guy that likes to have fun but takes

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this seriously. I keep things pretty clean. I don't really try to make any statements outside of musical statements. I stay away from political things. I learned my lesson on that. I don't say nothing about that. Really, I just be myself. I'm kind of a fun guy. I like to joke around and make fun of myself. Some of these songs are kind of funny, even if they're about something that sounds serious. That's really what I want to portray... fun. Something that people can all get together behind. Everybody wants to have fun and listen to fun music.

Rock And Blues International: Well, what's your funniest song?

Shawn Pittman: The funniest song... let's see... Here's a good example. On the latest album I did a song called "Fly Swat Woman." It's a true story. My wife had just let the dogs out and she'd leave the door open and no matter what time of the year, but especially in the warm time of the year, she'd always make sure all my amps were turned off. Every time she'd walk by my amp, if it were turned on, she'd turn it off. But when it came to the dogs, she'd leave the door wide open and all the flies would come right in. So, I'm sitting right there on the couch watching TV or something and I'm starting to get disconcerted by her walking around with this flyswatter and these flies are starting to land on me. The next thing I know, she's looking up at me and she's telling me to stay still because she has a fly she want to kill on my head or my arm. I think it was funny to her. So I thought, I'll just make a song out of this, "Fly Swat Woman." That's one of them, Or maybe the one about the time I moved back to Oklahoma and had to trade in my Texas driver's license for an Oklahoma driver's license. That was too symbolic for me man. It depressed the hell out of me. I wanted to keep my Texas license, so I went and wrote a song about how I wanted to be back in Texas. To me, the humorous aspects are pretty much everything. You kind of make fun of yourself sometimes and I think it makes life kind of easier.

Rock And Blues International: What's your most serious song?

Shawn Pittman: On the 2019 album, "Make It Right." It's a positive song. You know, when you're in one of those depressed moods, and sometimes these depressed kind of moods last... Sometimes these moods can last a long time, sometimes even a week and then you just find yourself in this rut. Sometimes they can last months. I think at this point, I had just been... nothing was going my way, and so I was just writing this song about being mad. So I'm writing the verses and talking about nobody's there for me, I don't have enough money, no place to play, no job, angry. And by the time I got to the third verse and I was reading over it and it was 'damn man, I sure am complaining a lot.' I thought, 'how do I stop this, what do I do to make this better' and that's when I decided to put a positive spin in there. What's my solution to this stuff?

And not only that, 'what is my part in it? How did I get to this point, and why? What decisions did I make in life? What judgement did I use that may or may not have been the best?' So, at that moment I realized I was responsible for my actions and I need to own up to that. Now, what do I do about it? How do I make it right? How do I dig myself out of this hole? That may not be what you call a serious song, but it surely is a self-reflective song where you take responsibility for your actions and do what you can to make it positive and to do better in life. That's why I call it "Make It Right." What can I do to make this right, and where's my part in all this and how can I improve myself and my decision making so I can go where I want to go and where I need to go.

Rock And Blues International: What is it that you want people to come away with when they see you perform or come away from one of your performances?

Shawn Pittman: I want people to know that there's somebody out there that's still hold to their heart the true fun and essence of the Blues, that they can walk away and say, "Dad gum, that guy does the real stuff. I want people to say that. I want people to hear all the stuff that they've been longing to hear, and I hope that I can deliver that, the real deal kind of Blues that people want to see and hear. The kind of stuff that people don't get to experience much these days. I may be kind of a throw back, you know, but I want people to know that there's somebody out there that still holds true to it, has fun with it, and sings their own songs, and has stories behind their songs. I guess that, mainly. It's fun and the Shawn Pittman Band plays good Blues! It's real.

As you can tell, Shawn Pittman is a very interesting man who has learned a lot of life lessons along the way. Despite the few setbacks that he has experienced over the years he has definitely not given up on his goal of bringing the sound of traditional Blues back to his fans and future audiences. He is a man with a mission and nothing is going to stop him this time around. Currently Shawn is on tour in Texas and you can catch him at Katie's in Bacliff on November 4th, The Big Easy in Houston on November 5th, Green Oaks Tavern in Humble on November 6th, Antone's in Austin on November 9th, Poor David's Pub in Dallas on November 12th, and the Gateway Bar in Yantis on November 20th. If you live in Texas, or are visiting the Lone Star State during this month, you might want to put one of these dates on your calendar to go and check out one of the finest Bluesmen you've ever heard.

As Shawn looks to the future and reflects on what he's done and plans to do, he tells us: "I have had many obstacles on my road just like anybody that has embarked on this lifestyle, some self-inflicted, but through my failures I have learned invaluable lessons about life and people, and my strengths as well as my weaknesses. As an artist I feel like I am just beginning. The one constant I have had is the desire to be great at what I do. The late Clifford Antone told me "it's all about making friends." I combine that piece of advice with something BB King told me when I asked him his secret for longevity: "Treat people how you want to be treated, and remember everybody has a boss."