



(Photo By Nate Bernard)

Tulsa-based guitarist/singer Shawn Pittman talks about Sam Myers, Double Trouble, Jim Gaines and Texas Blues

Posted by [Michael Limnios Blues Network](#) on May 14, 2020

"It (Blues) is a language unto itself that represents humanity at it's core. Simple truths in life."

Shawn Pittman: Make It Right!

Although he's often closely associated with the Lone Star State since originally taking up residence in Dallas, Texas in the early '90s, vocalist/guitarist Shawn Pittman is actually an Oklahoma native. Pittman was born in the small town of Talihina and raised in Norman, a city located in Cleveland County, Oklahoma. At eight years old he began taking piano lessons under the encouragement of his mother, but later began sneaking into his older brother's room to play on his drum kit. By the age of fourteen he had switched to guitar and was soon introduced to the mysterious sounds of Lightnin' Hopkins and Muddy Waters by Bracken Hale, a good friend and member of his seventh grade football team. Their friendship would prove significant as Hale would later collaborate with Shawn on writing material for many of his albums. Pittman moved to Dallas, Texas when he was seventeen years old where he attended the Booker T Washington High School of the Performing Arts. He later dropped out, but picked up his music education courtesy of his uncle who would take him over to the Schooner's jam in Dallas where he first met and learned from musicians like Brian 'Hashbrown' Calway, Sam Myers, Mike Morgan, Jim Suhler, Tutu Jones and many others. His first album, "Blues From Dallas," in 1996 and later picked up and retooled for his national debut in '97 as "Burnin' Up" on the Cannonball Records label. His second album, "Something's Gotta Give," was produced by Jim Gaines in '98. Pittman toured as rhythm guitarist for Susan Tedeschi briefly in '99, just long enough to make a television appearance with her on the Conan O'Brian Show. The following year he relocated to Austin and recorded his third album "Full Circle," backed by Stevie Ray Vaughan's rhythm section Double Trouble. In 2004, a more experimental and adventurous album titled "Stay" was released.

After a much-needed break from the music business, as well as some serious soul-searching from 2005-2008, Pittman returned to performing and made a plan to record one album per year. "Edge Of The World" marked Shawn Pittman's tenth release and contains an inspired program of original material by an accomplished singer, songwriter and guitarist, recalling all the vintage tones and ambiance of the great blues recordings of the 1950's and '60's. Even more astonishing is the fact that Shawn plays virtually every instrument on the CD, handling everything from vocals and guitar, to bass, drums and piano, on top of doubling as the album's producer and engineer! Special guest Jonathan Doyle (Mighty Blue Kings, Jimmy Sutton's Four Charms, White Ghost Shivers) represents the album's only other personnel by contributing tenor & baritone saxophone on four songs. When asked to comment about the inspiration behind his latest and most ambitious project Pittman simply states "I'm just playing the music I want to hear!" After seven years in Dallas (1993-1999) and fourteen years in Austin (2000-2013), Pittman moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma where he now resides closer to family and took time off to finish a degree in Information Technology. During which time he also released his 11th album (digital downloads only) 'Backslidin Again' (2015). After the 2018 release of his album "Everybody Wants To Know" Shawn Pittman toured extensively across Europe with renowned German/Turkish blues tandem Erkan Ozdemir on bass and his son Levent on drums. This worked out so well that the trio took out a couple of days of recording in Denmark. **It took**

two days of recording and a day of mixing at the Heyman Studio in Copenhagen to come up with 12 vibrant tracks that make up Shawn's 13th album "Make It Right" (March 2020).

[Interview by Michael Limnios](#)

Shawn, when was your first desire to become involved in the blues & who were your first idols?

I was about 14 and my first idols were Muddy Waters, Robert Johnson, John Lee Hooker, Lightnin Hopkins and Elmore James. When I was 17 I really got into Stevie Ray Vaughan as well. It wasn't until I was about 19 that I started getting into Magic Sam, Hubert Sumlin, the Thunderbirds and Jimmy Vaughn.



"To me, music has no race, it just sounds. If you like the sound, play it. If the music moves you what does it matter the race of the person playing it? Music is for everybody, it is something that can unite people." (Photo: Nate Bernard)

What was the first gig you ever went to & what were the first songs you learned?

The first gigs I went to to watch were around Dallas when I was about 17. The Hard Rock Café had blues on Thursday nights and I saw Mike Morgan, Hash Brown, Tutu Jones and others. I also used to go to whatever blues jam I could get into. My uncle took me to a place called 'Schooners' where I saw Sam Myers, among others and just absorb the way the bands played. The first songs I learned were 'Dust My Broom' and 'Hideaway'.

How do you describe your contact to people when you are on stage?

I like to tell them stories about how the songs I sing came about. I like for them to feel involved, not in a way like “sing along and clap with me” but in a way that they hear the words of the song.

How/where do you get inspiration for your songs & who were your mentors in songwriting?

In life experiences mainly. The stresses of life and money and relationships and in being happy. Willie Dixon is a big favorite of mine as well as Chuck Berry and Bob Dylan.

How has the Blues and Rock Counterculture influenced your views of the world and the journeys you've taken?

When I think of all the places I've been and people I have met, I can't help but think how miraculous it is that blues guitar is the reason! I have always been a rebellious soul, so I get that part of rock n roll. I believe that music is for everybody, no matter your background, what you do, where you come from. Everyone has a story to tell.

How do you describe "Make It Right!" sound and songbook? Where does your creative drive come from?

I would describe it as simple, raw, energetic and honest. I want people to be exposed to the greats of the past, so that their sounds live on in a modern way. I feel I have something to offer and that keeps me going.

What would you say characterizes Tulsa music scene in comparison to other US scenes and circuits?

Tulsa is extremely laid back. Some people compare it to Austin in the 70's. It is largely dominated by singer/songwriter country and Americana or what they call 'Red Dirt'. Let's face it blues scenes are on life support just about everywhere. When I compare the musicians to Dallas and Austin, there is no comparison, my heart is still in Texas. The attitude around here is “We don't care what happens outside of Tulsa” and they really don't. There is history here going back to JJ Cale, Leon Russell, Eric Clapton and Freddie King and I like that.

What do you miss most nowadays from the blues of the past? What are your hopes and fears for the future of?

I miss the natural sound of the instruments and some of the simplicity that came with it. I hope that musicians will still continue to learn from the greats and employ those styles into their playing. I fear that musicians will overlook the legends of the past and in the spirit of “taking blues to a new level” will look beyond the mark, missing out on the tones and technique of other eras.

If you could change one thing in the musical world and it would become a reality, what would that be?

That people could tell the difference between BS and stuff that is actually cool.

What are some of the most important lessons you have learned from your experience in the music paths?

Being yourself is what's important. Keeping the focus on being good at your craft. Add to that being humble but confident, and do your best to make friends with everybody you meet.



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What is the impact of music on the racial and socio-cultural implications? How do you want it to affect people?

To me, music has no race, it just sounds. If you like the sound, play it. If the music moves you what does it matter the race of the person playing it? Music is for everybody, it is something that can unite people.

Let's take a trip with a time machine, so where and why would you really want to go for a whole day?

I would probably want to go to Chicago around 1958. I would just be in heaven watching all the greats like Muddy Waters, Little Walter, Howlin Wolf, Otis Rush and I imagine Elmore James would have probably been around too.

What does the BLUES mean to you & what does Blues offered you?

Musically speaking 'Blues' is a term that represents a certain sound for me. It is a language unto itself that represents humanity at it's core. Simple truths in life. It is a way of overcoming our situations in life whether it is laughing at ourselves at times or allowing ourselves to feel pain and express it in a positive way. Blues has offered me a life that I wouldn't have had. I have met people and been to places I would have never dreamed before. I have traveled in many parts of the country and the world and met many wonderful people.

What do you learn about yourself from the blues music?

Sometimes I learn about things that are uncomfortable to learn about. I have learned how to be a man because of the blues and learn to face challenges and deal with them head on in a positive way.

How do you describe your sound & your progress, what characterize Shawn Pittman's philosophy of blues?

I describe my sound as a natural and raw sound. I find beauty in simplicity and rhythm. My philosophy is trying to maximize the meaning of each note.

What experiences in your life make you a GOOD musician?

The only thing that can make one a good musician is hard work, practice and dedication. I learn a lot about the guitar when I am doing things in the yard. I think playing sports actually helped me with music. A sport requires an amount of commitment and teamwork along with a mental disposition that takes discipline.



"I believe that music is for everybody, no matter your background, what you do, where you come from. Everyone has a story to tell." (Shawn Pittman / Photo by Ana Hortelano)

Do you remember anything funny or interesting from the recording time with rhythm section of Double Trouble?

Yes, I was so nervous and in awe I could hardly play when I was doing the first song. Chris Layton said "man you sound like dad gum John Lee Hooker!! In reference to my vocals. He told me that you need to come into the room like you're a great player and know it. I also got to spend time with Tommy Shannon who is a good friend. He is a gentle giant.

Are there any memories from your "studies" with Jim Gaines, which you'd like to share with us?

Jim had a very easy-going approach to things. He is able to look into an artist and find what makes them tick and then help them bring that out in the music. He told me some cool stories about how his first job mixing was at Stax and he worked on Albert King songs. That blew my mind. He also told me when Stevie Recorded Riviera Paradise they almost ran out of tape and he barely got Chris Layton's attention just in time...when they hit the last now about 2 seconds later the tape ran out!

Which was the best moment of your career and which was the worst?

The best moment was opening up for BB King for two nights at The House of Blues in Houston. He brought me on stage at the end of the night and I got to speak with him briefly

afterwards. The worst moment was when I played at a shark auction in France in a parking lot on the pier in Bordeaux.

From whom have you have learned the most secrets about the blues music?

Two people. Bernard Bigby who was my first mentor in Oklahoma and Brian 'Hash Brown' Calloway in Dallas.

What's been their experience with Sam Myers, which memory makes you smile?

He heard me drumming one night and got up on stage and said "Now that we have a real drummer up hear"...he didn't know I wasn't a drummer. He asked me what my name was but Hash Brown was worried about telling him my name because Sam didn't like me very much at that time. So Hash Brown made up a name Pat Schramm. From then on I knew Sam as Pat Shramm. People would ask Sam if he thought Shawn Pittman was a good player and he would say no, but "Pat Schramm could play a mean guitar!" (I played guitar with him later that night)



"Being yourself is what's important. Keeping the focus on being good at your craft. Add to that being humble but confident, and do your best to make friends with everybody you meet." (Photo: Shawn Pittman)



Shawn Pittman / Photo by Cristina Arrigoni

What is the best advice a bluesman ever gave you?

Sam Myers. "Just Be."

Some music styles can be fads but the blues is always with us. Why do think that is?

It is like a person that has integrity. They are not out for popularity but they are always the one you end up going to for help. When the 'in' crowd is no where to be found, the person that is honest and with true character is there for you. I look at the blues like that.

How do you see the future of blues music? Give one wish for the BLUES

I see the future of blues music repeating itself over and over as long as people keep passing it on down to the next generation of players. I wish more young people would be interested in it and understand it.

Which of historical blues personalities would you like to meet?

Robert Johnson or Leadbelly.

What are some of the most memorable gigs and jams you've had?

I jammed with Matt Guitar Murphy once at Legend's in Chicago. We were really playing off each other and he played some great stuff!

What characterize the sound of Texas Blues? Do you know why the sound of Texas, is connected to the blues rock?

Well that is hard to say and a very technical question. Texas blues is many things. T-Bone Walker and Lightnin Hopkins for example. I don't hear much of that in rock music today! Maybe it is because the most successful bands that have ever come out of Texas are ZZ Top, Stevie Ray Vaughan and the Fabulous Thunderbirds.

Why did you think that Texas Blues, continued to generate such a devoted following?

I think it is unique because there are many dimensions to it. Country blues, swing blues, rock n roll blues...I guess there is just something for everybody.

<http://blues.gr/profiles/blogs/guitarist-singer-shawn-pittman-talks-about-sam-myers-double>