



ARTIST BIOGRAPHY: ZAK CLAXTON

Zak Claxton has spent nearly his entire life in Southern California, and one listen to his eponymous debut album confirms the influence of a West Coast sound on this singer-songwriter's music. But rather than leaving you with that rather generic description, Zak happily lists his musical mentors.

"There's the side of me that is in awe of the more sensitive songwriters like Neil Young, Joni Mitchell, and Nick Drake," he says. "At the same time, I've always loved harder-edged music that incorporates intellect, so I need to credit the Who, the Police, the Cars and others. Oh, and Zeppelin, because... well, they're Zeppelin."

With that kind of list, you'd imagine Claxton's album to be a mish-mosh of disparate sounds, but from light acoustic-based songs to hard rock tunes, it's surprisingly consistent in its vibe. It could be because he spent years developing his musical identity, with stints at Berklee College of Music, Musicians Institute, and a bachelor's degree in music from Cal State University. But Zak credits the method in which he refined the songs: performing them live week in, week out.

"There's not a song on this album that I haven't played hundreds of times at shows, using only an acoustic guitar, my voice, and a harmonica every now and then," he says. "I gave the songs some time to gestate, and while the initial ideas stayed true from start through finish, the act of developing them in front of live crowds made them tighter and stronger."

Claxton describes his musical experiences previous to the past few years as "being in a bunch of cover bands that played tons of gigs around LA, and performing on hundreds of recordings that very few people will ever hear." But this versatile multi-instrumentalist focused his creativity exclusively on the creation of this album when he began a fresh stint of songwriting in early 2007. Entering the studio with his new batch of tunes in Spring 2008, he started working with acclaimed recording and mixing engineer Phil O'Keefe (columnist for EQ Magazine) purely in a technical role, but quickly found O'Keefe's advice in capturing the songs invaluable, and named him the co-producer of the album shortly thereafter. The album was recorded and mixed at O'Keefe's Riverside, CA facility, Sound Sanctuary Recording.

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Adding to the party were fellow multi-instrumentalists Bunny Knutson (Puzzlefish, No Use For A Name) and Ken Lee (Eleven Shadows), who added drums, keys, and additional guitar parts to the album. Their soulful contributions complemented Zak's multi-layered sound of acoustic and electric guitar, bass, and vocals. After the album was recorded and mixed, it was delivered to Maryland-based mastering engineer Bill Plummer, who has worked with an appropriately wide range of artists and bands (including the Cure, Carlos Santana, Maroon 5, Audioslave, Beyoncé, Whitney Houston, Herbie Hancock, and George Duke).

As opposed to creating interest in his original music the traditional way, Zak Claxton chose to take his show on the road in a slightly more modern route: through the computer. Doing live performances in the online virtual world of Second Life® since 2007, Zak has amassed a worldwide fan following, having performed live before thousands and thousands of people over the last two years. "There's no way I would have been able to gain the level of recognition I currently have, even if constant touring had been a possibility. I am just thankful that these opportunities are available now."

MORE INFO, PHOTOS, SONG SAMPLES & MORE:

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