



## **Bio: ERIC CHURCH**

Church's songs are as straightforward as he is. His is music that looks its listener in the eye and speaks plainly about the human condition. It is a line that passes through Merle Haggard and Waylon Jennings to John Prine and Steve Earle, and is finding a handful of torchbearers in this new century.

"Honesty is my number one responsibility," Church says. "If you listen to this, you'll find out who I am."

Church grew up in Granite Falls, North Carolina, in an area known as one of the world's furniture capitals. He recalls being four years old, standing on a table at a local restaurant, singing "Elvira" to a waitress and a handful of patrons who would reward him with change.

"I was 13 when I started writing," he says. "It was before I learned to play guitar. I had a lot in me that I wanted to get out, and I started writing lyrics and singing, and I thought, 'If I'm going to play these for people, I'm going to have to learn how to play guitar.'" He bought a cheap, hard-to-tune one and taught himself to play, influenced by his parents' eclectic tastes, which stretched from Motown to bluegrass.

It was at a little bar in the North Carolina Mountains, however, when his epiphany came: "I was watching a band that had the place packed," he says. "I knew the songs they were playing on guitar, but I'd been doing them in my dorm room at Appalachian State and they were doing them in a place that was slamming, with people stuffing money into the tip jar that was being passed around. I thought, 'I can do this as well as they can,' and two weeks later I had a gig."

He had quickly formed a band with his roommate, his brother, and another guitarist, and temporarily picked the name the Mountain Boys. The first night they knew just 14 songs, but they faked their way through a four-hour set and held onto enough of the crowd to help launch them as a regional act. In a year or so, Eric was throwing original songs into the set mix and not long afterward was selling CDs of his own material. They were playing four or five nights a week in bars, at frat and sorority parties in Asheville, Hickory, and Boone.

A talented athlete, he played basketball, baseball and golf in high school, but in college, he turned to music, riding those early gigs to regional acclaim and then a trip to Nashville. "I wanted to move two years before I graduated," he says, "but my dad made me a deal. He said, 'If you'll graduate, I'll pay for your first six months in Nashville,'

which I thought was a pretty good offer. I graduated with a degree in marketing and he was true to his word."

The first days were tough ones. "I was scared," he says. "I didn't know a soul. I didn't know what part of town was good or bad, didn't know the publishing companies or the industry. I just had something inside me saying, 'You have to be there.' That first week was terrifying. I got the phone book and started looking up publishers, thinking, 'I'll call these guys, we'll meet and I'll get a publishing deal.' Of course, once you've been here you know it doesn't work that way. I guess a lot of it was being young and stupid, but there's a lot to being young and stupid. There's a vitality to that. If you actually had waited a few years and developed common sense you probably wouldn't do it, but you're so young you think, 'I can do this. It's no big deal.'"

The financial cushion his father had given him gave him time to make contacts and take meetings. Six months in, he had to take a day job, but six months after that, he was signed to a publishing deal at Sony Tree. "When I got that first check from Sony Tree and they were paying me money to do it, I thought I had arrived, because I was getting paid to do something I'd be doing anyway," he points out.

His family and his small-town background had given him a diamond-pure work ethic, which served him well. "I just kind of threw muscle into the writing, so we had a large pool to draw from when it came time to record," he says. "I think I demoed 60 or 70 songs at Sony last year, and you probably demo one out of every four you write, so I wrote a lot. I figure they're paying me to be a songwriter and that's what I'm here to do."

He began getting cuts, including Terri Clark's "The World Needs A Drink." Then, Arthur Buenahora at Sony Tree introduced Eric to producer Jay Joyce; the two clicked instantly, and began cutting demos.

"The night I got the record deal with Capitol was a really good gig," he says. "I knew that whether I got the deal or not, this was as good as I could do. It clicked. You just have those nights. During 'Lightning,' the whole crowd was hushed and I knew they were listening. I knew they were with me on the song, and there's nothing as great as a performer as to capture the crowd."

Two days later, on his birthday, he was in Capitol's office being offered a recording deal; he and Joyce then set about capturing his essence in Joyce's basement studio. The result is a CD that launches Church with a firm identity both musically and lyrically, and gives him his own niche in a diverse country landscape.

"I think we've made an honest record. I don't think there's a song on there that's not me," he says. "It's songs about what's going on in the world--this is what I think. You can agree or disagree. I just don't want them to hear it and go, 'That's nice' and move on. I personally like music that goes way out and picks a side." (3/06)

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