

## INDIE SCENE



Randee St. Nicholas

## SHELBY LYNNE



## “Hell, no” to record labels, hello to independence

SHELBY LYNNE DOESN'T MINCE words when discussing the showdown that ensued when she presented her new album, *Tears, Lies, and Alibis*, to her record company—only to see it rejected. “When Lost Highway said they didn’t want the record, I said, ‘That’s fine, I’ll just do my own thing. I’m tired of this shit,’” she says.

Twenty-four hours later, once and for all fed up after shuffling among five different record companies over the course of her 20-year career, she declared her intention to leave the label and release the album on her own. “As soon as I knew they weren’t going to put out the record that I worked so hard on, that’s when I started digging in,” she says. “Record labels don’t want to put out records that are good. They want to put out records that will sell. Gone are the days when a record label will say: ‘We believe in you, you’re a great artist who makes great records and we just want to have you.’”

Buoyed by optimism, confidence and determination, the Alabama native elected to create her own label, Everso Records, to release *Tears*. The 10-song collection is by turns sassy, soulful and unabashedly

introspective. “The songs come from what I know, within my life,” she says. “It’s how I see it in my head and feel it in my heart!”

The sound is appropriately stripped down, which was part of the problem—she says that Lost Highway asked her to re-record it with a big-name producer. “I had Phil Ramone produce my last album [2008’s *Just a Little Lovin*] and you don’t really get any bigger than that,” she says. “But this is the answer I got: ‘Well, you just set the standard so high ...’ It was hard to get a big-name producer when they cut the budget in half.”

Lynne has never hesitated to follow her muse in any direction. She initially found fame as a mainstream country singer, but made her true breakthrough with 2000’s old-school soul turn *I Am Shelby Lynne*—which, in a classic example of music-business logic, helped her win the Best New Artist Grammy a full decade into her career. Along the way she has also touched upon pop, Americana, jazz, swing and blues. Today, as the captain of her recording destiny, she can continue to pursue her artistic ambitions without commercial calculation.

“Now I’m as happy as I can be,” she says. “I’m free. I can do my own thing and make my fans happy because I’m not going to be held back by this ridiculous corporate thing. If I want to record seven records a year, I can do it.”

Her new independence also means she’s finally able to participate in all parts of the process, musical and otherwise. “I know exactly what’s going on, who’s doing what, where the money’s going—and it feels great,” she says. “Hell, if I don’t know how to do a record company by now, I might as well go work at the Waffle House. Not that there’s anything wrong with the Waffle House!”

That said, lots of artists say they don’t want a record label. What if some nice company came along tomorrow with an especially tempting offer?

“No, no, no, *hell* no,” she declares. “I don’t give a damn about that. When I make up my mind, I can’t go back. It’s time for me to move on from that big machine. I’d rather have a smaller machine and actually get what I’m doing out to the people.”

—Lee Zimmerman