

SPOTLIGHT



Emily Joyce

DWIGHT YOAKAM

Hillbilly music's top hat records a new album the old-fashioned way

"THIS ALBUM OCCURRED VERY spontaneously," says Grammy-winning punk cowboy Dwight Yoakam of his latest, *Second Hand Heart*. "There were unique, spontaneous moments in the studio, even though there were some things I had carried with me—the song 'Second Hand Heart' was something I began writing before I started *3 Pears*," he adds, referring to his previous record, released in 2012. "But for whatever reason, it didn't make that album. I'm really glad, because it was meant to be: It became the springboard for this record."

The 58-year-old Kentucky native—whose celebrated 1986 debut *Guitars, Cadillacs, Etc., Etc.* established him as a leader in the new traditionalist movement—claims this organic style is not always the way recording has worked for him. "Being spontaneous became more the case when I started self-producing," he says. "There is a burden to that, but it also creates freedom, because you're not on someone else's schedule. The burden is that you don't have the sounding board of someone you trust as a producer."

Yoakam counts the seasoned ear of former Warner Bros. chief Lenny Waronker as being crucial during the *Second Hand Heart* sessions. But he also credits his

collaboration with Beck on *3 Pears*—which has become one of his most critically acclaimed albums—as being influential on his latest project.

"Beck was also a catalyst for that spontaneity," he says. "I went to his house, and we were talking and I said, 'I've got this idea for a song.' He began running around plugging in things and setting up. We laid it down, I thought, as a guide. Beck said, 'Are you going to put some electric guitar on top of that?' I said, 'Isn't that a demo?' Beck said, 'No, we're going to keep what you just did.' I understood why. It was a throwback to the way bands would have singles recording sessions, right through the '60s."

Second Hand Heart also includes two covers, one of which is the Appalachian classic "Man of Constant Sorrow." Yoakam's bristling version rivals the George Clooney-led rendition in the film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* "The Soggy Bottom Boys!" Yoakam says with a laugh. "This is an homage to their absurd rendition of it. I thought, 'Let's see if we can reinterpret this and go back to the cowpunk scene I was a part of in L.A.'s early punk days. I really admired what the Coen Brothers did with that.'"

—Linda Laban

