

Mp3 Hayseed - Melic



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"Hayseed is, in my mind, on the same level as Bob Dylan and Neil Young and Van Morrison," says Lucinda Williams. "That's just what I think, that's my opinion, for what it's worth. I don't say that about everybody who comes down the pike..." 12 MP3 Songs COUNTRY: Country Folk, COUNTRY: Traditional Country Details: MODERN TRADITIONALIST Country Intuition And Contemporary Intellect Intersect In Hayseed's Music by Jon Weisberger (written for No Depression magazine) "Hayseed is, in my mind, on the same level as Bob Dylan and Neil Young and Van Morrison," says Lucinda Williams. "That's just what I think, that's my opinion, for what it's worth. I don't say that about everybody who comes down the pike, and you can ask anybody who knows me. Music has to grab me in a certain way, and the stuff that does that, it's a time-transcendent thing. I put Hayseed right in there with that batch of stuff." Strong words, especially about a guy with just two albums to his credit. One might chalk Williams' testimonial up to the vagaries of individual taste, but her view is shared by a talented and influential circle of friends and supporters - folks for whom Hayseed has done nothing other than be what he is, yet who have provided him indispensable help in realizing his musical ideas and getting them out into the world. "You almost feel like that's what I'm supposed to do in life," Hayseed says, "because I bumped into these guys - there was no design to it, it's like a providential chain of events that have transpired over my life." Hayseed is, of course, not his real name. Born Christopher Wyant in 1966, he grew up in Western Kentucky, where his father was a minister in the United Pentecostal Church International, a stern sect that traces its origins to a 1916 split in the Assemblies of God. "We were taught that we're separate, we're in the world but not of it," he says. "It was just a mindset that you grew up with. There's a whole hierarchy there, and of course with my dad being a minister, I represented my dad, I represented my church, I represented my denomination, and then I represented God. Most times I felt it was more of a blessing; you felt like it was

a calling or something. But there were a whole lot of issues that I had to get out of the way in order to get a balance later in life about just who I am, rather than representing everything else before I ever got to represent who I am." With little in the way of contemporary culture to influence him - secular entertainment was off-limits, and the family didn't even own a television - Hayseed grew up rooted in the music of the church. "It's an integral part of the service, so we grew up in churches where any instrument you played, bring it to church and wail away on it; you don't have to be good. And that's one of the things that made me who I am, because I didn't have anybody judging me. From the time I was a little kid, I was encouraged to sing at the top of my lungs, and as emotionally as I wanted to." When he moved to Nashville in 1986, Hayseed didn't so much break with as slide away from the church, grappling with what he calls a "spiritual withdrawal and rebirth" even as he hung around the fringes of the gospel and contemporary Christian music scenes, finding work with gospel star Bobby Jones and, eventually, as a roadie with Christian-cum-alternative-rock band Chagall Guevara. He scored that gig through David Perkins, who Hayseed describes as a "brother and mentor." It was through Perkins that he met Richard Price, currently Lucinda Williams' bassist and partner, but at the time a guy with some time on his hands. "I was kind of bored," Price recalls. "I didn't have that much to do around town, except freelance a little bit on the bass. I told Perkins one time I needed something to do. He said, 'Well, we got this big ol' boy with a big voice that's helping us with our equipment with Chagall Guevara that could probably use some help.'" With Price's help, Hayseed (who plays no instruments) began to shape the songs he had been writing as a reflection of his spiritual crisis and his sense of being an outsider. A simple demo of his song "God-Shaped Hole" found its way to Bloodshot Records, and a re-recording of it appeared on the label's 1996 compilation disc Nashville: The Other Side Of The Alley. That version, in turn, anchored a six-song demo cassette called Homegrown. As Price says, "That got around. People started biting on it immediately." Listening to the tracks from the cassette, it's not hard to see why. It's not easy to create a genuine synthesis of the modern with the traditional, yet that's precisely what Hayseed has done. The melodies of "Cold Feet", "God-Shaped Hole", "Between The Lines" and "Origin Of The Snake" are close kin to countless old-time tunes, and for the musicians playing them, they're an intimately familiar language. Yet the lyrics carry sharp contemporary accents, preoccupied with guilt, sin, salvation and eternity - even when, as on "Cold Feet", the dark verses contrast with a cheerfully rowdy chorus. "He's very bright, and he's a brilliant lyricist," says Williams. "And you don't run across that very often. There

just aren't that many great songwriters; you might as well be blunt about it. There's not that much interesting stuff lyrically, that challenges you. Hayseed's music challenges the listener, and that's what's going to set him apart from a lot of other people." "I think the fact that he was kept from the high-speed world for a large part of his childhood kind of gave him a clearer view of things when he finally came out into it," says Price, "because he hadn't been really bombarded with all the stuff we get on the TV and the radio 24 hours a day as much as a lot of people are. So once he started writing, part of him might have been trying to escape some of his religious background, but on the other hand it gave him a lot of spiritual insight. "He's an avid reader, loves to read poetry and novels and all kinds of stuff. I just think that as he began to get out in life, when he started making observations and writing them down, it makes it fresh. We can be using fiddles and mandolins and dulcimers and the music can have a mountain, Appalachian background to it, but when his lyrics come across, they don't sound like yesterday. They sound like right now." Hayseed himself laughs about it: "At one point I read a Marcel Duchamp quote, it might not be original to him because I've seen it elsewhere, a little thing that said, 'Small minds talk about people, average minds talk about events, and great minds talk about ideas,' and I kind of got that in the back of my head, and thought, well, I want to be a great mind." Still, he says, his music flows from his experience. "That's something I still haven't quite shaken out of, is getting beyond those spiritual concerns. Even in my current writing, I have to be aware of it, because that's the theme that has dominated my life. So when I start writing a song, that's the first thing that comes up. So for me to just sit down and write a love song is much harder." Impressive as it was, Homegrown turned out to be only a prelude of sorts. Heinz Geissler of Watermelon Records got hold of a copy and contacted Price. "He said hey, why don't you do six more songs and we'll keep the first six just like they are. So our demo turned out to be six of the songs that are on the record, with just a little bit of electronic touch-up work. Then we did the second six from scratch and put them together and had a record." That album, Melic, was released in September 1998 on Watermelon/Sire, but vanished from the marketplace almost immediately when Watermelon filed for bankruptcy at the end of 1998. Watermelon released Hayseed from his contract, but it took him nine months and a personal letter to Sire president Seymour Stein to retrieve the finished discs. Stein agreed to the request, allowing Hayseed to return the record to circulation independently in the fall of '99 (for mail order and distribution info contact hayseedsings@yahoo.com). The new songs that fleshed out Melic were more wide-ranging than the six on Homegrown. Three especially philosophical Hayseed originals

were set against a delicate instrumental titled "Voices" (written and performed by mandolinist/fiddler Tramp) and two cover tunes: the durable hymn "Precious Memories", with harmony vocals from Lucinda, and the classic Allman Brothers ballad "Melissa". Most of these tracks were recorded with the help of another providential friend, guitarist Bryan Sutton, at the time a featured member of Ricky Skaggs' Kentucky Thunder. "We had met a couple of times but we never actually hooked up, started working together, until it came time to do Melic," Hayseed says. "I didn't really know that much about what he was doing on his own. I knew he worked with a lot of acoustic instruments personally - he had an ADAT in his bedroom - and that's about all I knew. He said, 'I'd love to do it.' We got together and started working on it, and ended up finishing the record and becoming better buds in the process." Hayseed knows he's reliant on his friends, and he's appreciative. "Because I don't play anything, I'm in a real precarious position; all I can do is sing it and explain, 'Well, this is where I'm coming from here,'" he says. "And I've been fortunate to hook up with guys who have the same kind of background. I can say, 'Think about you're playing this church song in a nightclub, and how that kind of tension just naturally would exist.'" Indeed, that tension is at the very root of Melic, and it works in no small part because of the personal experiences behind the music. Hayseed doesn't put on an "Appalachian" voice; that Kentucky twang is part of him. The musicians - Sutton, Tramp, bassists Markie Sanders, Mark Fain and Larry Marrs, banjoists Vince Farsetta and Doug Dillard, singer Joy Lynn White and the others - aren't taking up something new and exotic. Not surprisingly, many of them have gospel backgrounds themselves; all have grown up playing one variety or another of country music, or adopted it as their own so long ago that they've absorbed it into their identities. That's not to say they're incapable of playing anything else. Indeed, anyone who expects Hayseed to continue only in the groove established on Melic is in for a surprise; he has plans, and lots of them. "I see each one of my records as being a concept work, each one having its own kind of thing, and so I've already got the next three or four concepts laid out in my head," he says. "This first one was my roots stuff, where I came from; the next one was different but it's tied into it, and then the third one is probably the one I want to do that's conceptually the spiritual record, where there'll be a lot of musical styles involved, but the theme runs through all of it will be different takes on spirituality. Then I want to do a hard country record with Buddy Miller. I've got tons of ideas, it's just a matter of getting it out there." Price adds, "We just decided that on his first unveiling to the world, it might be more honest to have the first record reflect on where he came from, which the music definitely does -

and the lyrics do too, but the lyrics are a little more modern than the average backwoods guy. So I think that we have always planned on starting at a certain point and, record-by-record, expanding, because his voice is capable of crossing a lot of barriers. I'm sure we're always going to have acoustic instruments involved with him to some degree, but we're going to expand, because he's got some stuff that rocks pretty good, too." "That's the whole reason I allow myself to be called Hayseed," Wyant concludes. "It's so that I can deconstruct and then reconstruct the image of what a hayseed is. Musically, I've got this whole body-of-work idea, that who I am is not going to be seen by the public until years from now when they look back over it. Kind of like Willie Nelson - he does so many styles - or Steve Earle. Well, I can do all that, and the idea of somebody being called a hayseed doing a jazz record or a rock 'n' roll record... "It's always going to reflect who I am, and my heritage; there's always going to be that essence running through it. But I'm not going to be just one thing for the rest of my life." People who are interested in Emmylou Harris Steve Earle Lucinda Williams should consider this download.

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