

## **HANK3 Bio**

**~Penned by Randy Blythe**

Somewhere outside Nashville, Tennessee sits a place where the ghosts of country music legends don't have to weep into their beers over the despicable current state of Music Row, where the spectres of Joey and Dee Dee Ramone can comfortably have a drink with John Bonham and Jimi Hendrix and know that someone still doesn't give a good goddamn for the rules. All those old boys can sit back, enjoy some new music being made, and let the weight of innovation slide off their shoulders for a minute, because there are still a few true originals left, and one of them, Hank 3, is working non-stop in his Haunted Ranch studio abode doing the hard work, creating the real deal- rebel music for rebel fans. This time it's a triple threat- a double country album called "Brothers of the 4x4" and a blazing punk rock record titled "A Fiendish Threat".

It's easier to understand the unique music of Shelton Hank Williams III (known to fans worldwide as Hank 3, or even simpler, just "3"), if you know a little bit about the dude, and the very first thing you should know is that he is entirely and completely his own man. Yes, he is the son and grandson of those Hanks, and when you have inherited a name like Hank Williams and have the balls enough to pick up a guitar, there are bound to be expectations and pre-conceived notions of what and how you should play music. The weight of that name (not to mention an eerie resemblance to the original- the late Minnie Pearl, upon meeting Hank 3 was said to have thought she saw a ghost for a second) would have easily crushed a lesser man into a lifetime of novelty-act nostalgia cover band status, but Hank 3 has managed to honor his namesakes in the best way possible- by doing his own thing, just as he has from the very start. Indeed, when asked what kind of country he first wanted to make his fast response is "Well, I knew I didn't want to be Hank Williams or Hank Jr, that's for sure."

But to simplify Hank 3 as a privileged reactionary kicking muddied cowboy boots against his legacy would be doing him a great disservice. Williams was not raised in a studio or a mansion, but in a regular working class home by his mother, educating himself musically in the grimy rock clubs of Nashville, paying dues and earning a few spare dollars bashing the drums for local punk and metal bands. In the mid 1990's, Hank 3 entered into a infamous and tumultuous relationship with Curb Records in order to pay some bills. When he finally picked up a guitar and raised that rich voice singing country, it was in order to make child support payments after the long lost mother of his son reappeared in the form of a court order. But out of economic hardship and heartbreak a new country outlaw arose from a distinguished bloodline, and while Williams acknowledges and honors his roots ("I show respect and play a few old songs here and there"), he remains fiercely true to his own uncompromising vision. This has contributed to him rejecting the party line musically, and not only just because he does what he damn well likes- his original approach to playing is partially a matter of necessity, not choice alone. "With my learning disabilities, straight up music theory was difficult for me. I took a few guitar lessons when I was younger, but the teacher kept on yelling at me like a damn Marine Corps drill instructor, saying 'Do it this way! Do it that way!' I couldn't understand that, that's not the way my mind works. I figured I had a pretty

good ear, so I learned to play guitar by listening to records- ZZ Top's 'La Grange' was one of the first licks I picked up, and I just took it from there, figuring it out myself. I just did my own thing, man."

To say that Hank 3's "pretty good ear" for music has worked out for him is a vast understatement, as his packed shows tour after tour attest, and the crowd ain't there to hear "Your Cheatin' Heart" either. Having earned respect and a loyal fan base for his music the old school way, slugging it out in the clubs and honky-tonks night after night and mile after mile, a Hank 3 show is nothing if it ain't a beer drinkin', hell raisin', sing-a-long damn good time. It's singing the words of Hank 3 that leaves everyone hoarse and the infectious good time vibe that ensures everyone will be hung-over at work the next day. You may not be able to talk and your head may feel like shit, but your gonna be smiling for a few days after a Hank 3 show, because you'll remember a night where everyone from band to audience left it all on the floor in a puddle of blood, sweat, and beers. When you listen to a Hank 3 song, you know you are hearing the words of a man who actually lived them, felt them in his gut like a rabbit punch at the beginning of a bar fight, or the burn of a lover's last look as she walks out the door for another man. Sometimes his words can feel like a dying man's hard fought last gasp, ringing out hot and sticky like a freshly skinned buck's blood on the blade of a hunting knife. And unlike the vast majority of the fairy tale pop masquerading as country currently emitting from Nashville, Hank 3's music grows from strong roots- his roots, and reflects reality- his reality. "All those radio country songs aren't really country. Most producers in Nashville won't use a stand-up bass in the studio because it's too hard for them to make it sound good. Country music to me has a stand up bass, brother- and the fiddle, banjo, and steel guitar. Plus all those damn songs are happy songs. Life ain't always happy."

Hank 3's latest country record is just that- country, and the realness of it shines throughout the record like moonlight hitting a mason jar of corn liquor- it ain't always the smoothest, and it doesn't come wrapped in a fancy package, but it's 100% pure whoop-ass in a bottle that gets the job done quicker and better and reminds you where you originally came from once you figure out what just hit you. On "Outdoor Plan" he sings of fishing and hunting as a way of life, and it's a fact that more than one deer and turkey has met its maker at the end of his gun's barrel. The title track, "Brothers of the 4x4" celebrates the wide open full throttle love of off roadin' and rootin' in a four wheel drive- the cover of the record shows Williams mud bogging in a custom 4x4, and it's not some redneck rental- that's his ride. And because life ain't always happy, when the heartbreak and hard times cracks through the sonic celebration on songs like "Loners 4 Life" and "Ain't Broken Down", it's because Hank 3 is well acquainted with the darker side of life, and not as some tourist. The album is a rich and gritty sounding mixture of sadness, pride, hope- in other words, it's a great country record.

Besides living the songs subject matter first, Williams sang and played both guitar and drums on the records. As if pulling triple duty wasn't enough, he engineered, produced, mixed and mastered all the tunes as well. Not bad for someone who in his own words is dyslexic and has ADD- as Williams says, "my mind is all over the place"... But even a man talented and driven enough to do (count 'em) seven jobs at once has his limits, so Hank 3 has once again

assembled a top-notch ensemble of pickers and pluckers for "Brothers Of The 4x4" and "A Fiendish Threat". The aforementioned required stand up bass holds the low end down at the deft hands of Zach Shedd, with David McElfresh and Billy Contreras whipping razor sharp bows across the fiddle. Daniel Mason handles banjo, with a special guest appearance on "Possum In A Tree" by former National Old-Time Banjo Champion Leroy Troy working his banjo in the old school clawhammer style, while Andy Gibson wrings the sweetest of notes out his stand up steel guitar. Finally, long-time collaborator and fellow multi-instrumentalist extraordinaire Johnny Hiland rips his chicken pickin' guitar to feathers and shreds.

These boys don't play around when they play, and that's evident in the precision of this record. Hank3 runs a tight ship, by choice and necessity- in an era where digital editing is so standard that players barely have to be able to, well, actually play anymore, Williams records tracks on his trusty Korg D1600, a piece of hardware that doesn't allow for the questionable tech wizardry and post-production "performance enhancement" that make most records today sound so mechanically sterile. The songs sound like they were actually recorded, not programmed (a critical difference these days), and the music is nailed together tighter than dick's hatband, but that's because the players brought the hammer down hard on their instruments, not a producer's finger clicking down on a mouse. "There's very little editing on this record. Almost all of the tracks are single takes. It can take a long, long time to get it right, but what you hear is what was really played." Hank says with justified pride.

Recording in his own home and releasing music on his own label, the Megaforce distributed Hank 3 Records, allowed Williams complete creative control during the four month period it took to make both records. The visually mind-blowing environs of the Haunted Ranch have certainly seeped into Hank 3's music as well- every square inch of the house is covered in fliers from his past, notes from friends, memorabilia from various musicians, and miles of strung lights and enough skulls to build an ossuary. The place looks like a grenade exploded during a Halloween punk show held at the greatest honky-tonk in Dixie. "Yeah man, I'm eatin' it, breathin' it, livin' it here, and I can record whenever I want without having to worry about anyone else" he says, "My story is on those walls. My son, Coleman, says that one day I'm gonna have to paint the house red and turn it into a Hank 3 museum." Is it haunted? "Let's just say many, many people, and I'm not talking two or three, I'm talking well over a dozen have all felt something here- there's been lots of strange happenings. I had one tour manager try to sleep here one time and he came to me and said 'Take me to a hotel, there's no way I'm sleeping in this damn place!' Sometimes things will happen and I'll talk to it, like 'Haha, that was a good one, ya got me!'" I've never had the house on any of those paranormal shows, because I never wanted to disrespect it, whatever it is. In light of all that, when I decided to call the place The Haunted Ranch it just felt like the most natural name for the home and studio."

With "Brothers of the 4x4" and "A Fiendish Threat" set for release October 1st, Williams is ready to hit the road, and when he hits the road, he hits it much harder than most. Hank 3 shows are legendary for their length and intensity, averaging three hours a night, starting with a country set and ending with whatever his latest musical experiment happens to be. For this

touring cycle, fans will get to taste the hardcore punk horror rock of "A Fiendish Threat", a rippingly fast blast of sounds reminiscent of The Misfits, Minor Threat, 7 Seconds, The Ramones and other punk rock greats that are as much a part of Hank 3's musical identity as his country roots. But "A Fiendish Threat", like all of the man's musical output, is anything but a formulaic, by-the-numbers rehash of what has been previously done by others. Stand up bass, fiddle, and banjo are not exactly standard instruments in punk rock, but they are on this record, riding beneath 3's howling distorted vocals. Perhaps this is the birth of rebelcore punk? Whatever you want to call it, Williams has left his own touch on the genre, even utilizing a bizarrely beautiful Hula-music-on-acid sounding Hawaiian guitar at times. Some of the songs can make the listener feel like someone dropped LSD in their cheap draft beer at a CBGB matinee show headlined by a ghoulish Hawaiian punk band. "A Fiendish Threat" is yet another of Williams' already numerous signature sounds, and he's excited to put it in front of the audience for the first time. "You know when you do a new record, you just want to play it for all your friends. That's what I'm excited for with this punk record, I get use a voice that doesn't get used that often, and pay respects to some of my influences at the same time. Doing this record made feel like I was growing stronger- it took some of the years off me, to tell you the truth. Playing it makes me feel young again," he laughs, "How long I will be able to pull it off all depends on the voice, man." The voice is a valid concern for Hank 3, who once played a five hour show, in the middle of some very real chaos. "There was a some heavy stuff going on with everybody at that show; man, I'm talking about the real heavy shit. I figured that if everyone was going to jail that night, then I was gonna make damn sure I was gonna be the last man standing."

With these dual releases, "Brothers Of The 4x4" and "A Fiendish Threat" added to his already huge and varied arsenal of music, Hank 3 will be raising all sorts of hell on stage while the fans raise their glasses in the audience once again, and you can bet your last dollar a damn good time will be had by all. The man goes full throttle all the time, every time, as anyone who has ever been to one of his innumerable shows will attest. How long can he keep it up? "Man, I'm just out here doing my thing, doing the best I can" Williams says with typical modesty "Making these records takes it out of me, and I realize as I get older that I don't bounce back like I used to after recording one. But I haven't been on the road in ten months, and I'm ready and raring to go."

For a man who just simultaneously recorded not one but three albums, those sound like the words of a man who is still pretty damn determined to be the last man standing. Listen to "Brothers of the 4x4" and "A Fiendish Threat", go to a show, and find out for yourself. Just remember the next day, after a few aspirins, a dinner at your own table, and a sleep in your own bed that Hank 3 will be down the road doing his thing again, and for that rebel, "doing the best I can" means something a little different than it does for the average man.

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