

Up close and personal with Clint Black - Traditional country artist booked in Bossier March 8

Written by BY TERRY MATHEWS, News-Telegram Arts Editor
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Imagine you've hit the big time in country music. You've been named Top Male Vocalist, earned Single of the Year and have been chosen as Best Vocal Event of the Year by the Academy of Country Music; you've been named Favorite Country New Artist by at the American Music Awards and you earned the Horizon Award and the Male Vocalist of the Year by the Country Music Association.

You've had a very successful run with your label RCA and you've married a beautiful actress who is the love of your life.

All of sudden, your record label wants you to start covering other songwriters' tunes. There's nothing wrong with your work – you've sold over 12 million copies of your records – but they are insistent that you record other songs.

You have a decision to make. If you're Clint Black, you stick to your guns, leave the label and strike out on your own. Today, a lot of artists dodge the suits in Nashville, but in the early 1990s, leaving the security of an established label was a huge – and remarkably insightful – move.

Black, who has also had roles on television and in film, will be appearing in the Paradise Theater at Margaritaville Casino and Resort on Saturday, March 8. (He'll be at The Majestic in Dallas on March 6.) Although on vocal rest during his current three-month tour, the country artist took time to answer a few questions by e-mail.

□ □ □ **News-Telegram:** You're in the middle of a three-month tour that brings you back to our corner of the world. The Majestic (in Dallas) and the Paradise Theater (at Bossier City's Margaritaville) are such great venues. There seems to be a resurgent interest in listening rooms. Do you like playing smaller halls? If so, why?

Clint Black: I like the closeness with the audience. The rooms sound better and are more comfortable, but the intimacy is what allows you go the full range of dynamics. You can only get so small musically in the big venues, where as the small venues allow for small or big sounds.

N-T: You've had a long career ... now, young artists cite you as an influence. How do you feel about being part of country's establishment?

CB: I like the idea that artists who've succeeded were listening to me on their way up. I had my favorites growing up and I know what their music meant to me, so I feel honored to be mentioned.

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N-T: Rather than bend to pressure, you left RCA records after a 14-year relationship and after selling more than 12 million albums. A lot of artists are now choosing this route, but when you did it, it was a bold step. How did you come to the decision?

CB: RCA didn't like the fact that I write my own songs. I don't belong with these companies who don't appreciate what I do. Easy decision. If you asked RCA or any major label what my problem is/was, it would be that I don't record songs written by the publisher's stable of writers. 22 number one hits wasn't enough to cement my place as the writer of my music. Go figure!

N-T: Talk about your relationship with Roy Rogers. I know I'm not the first person to notice the physical resemblance. You both have an air of sincerity and ... of course, those smiling eyes. The 1992 tribute you did with other artists looked like such fun. What was it like to share that special moment with one of this country's most beloved heroes?

CB: I found Roy to be the very gentleman we all thought him to be and deserving of all the love and respect he received. He was a great character and I felt honored to work with him. I share a story about him in the show, in fact!

N-T: You recorded "Chain of Fools" with the Pointer Sisters. That must have been a kick! Your harmonica solo during the break is killer. You're self-taught, right? Do you play it during your current tour?

CB: I play a lot more in this show than previous tours. I did teach myself and molded my style after Magic Dick, of J. Geils Band fame.

N-T: You also did a duet with Wynonna Judd, who has been known to chew up the scenery – and other artists – with her powerful voice, yet you matched her note for note. The ballad, "A Bad Goodbye," is a unique break up song. How did you come to select it for "The Hard Way?"

CB: When I wrote "A Bad Goodbye," it was intended for me alone. When the tour with Wynonna was booked, I had the idea that we could do a duet every night and that would be a good choice. I pushed into a broom closet at the Opry and played it for her. She loved the idea and we were off to the studio!

□ **N-T:** You recently performed a song for Andrew Maholic, the son of fallen soldier Master Sgt. Thomas D. Maholic. How on earth did you keep it together for filming?

CB: It's not easy to keep from getting caught up in the emotion. I've had a lot of practice being around people with heartbreaking stories and I've learned how to stay focused on what I'm doing for them. The aim is to bring a moment to their lives that isn't down and maudlin. If I were to let myself empathize in the moment, I couldn't get through a song or a speech without breaking down.

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N-T: I was watching the video for one of your first big hits, "Killin' Time" and noticed a couple dancing by the stage at 2:50 that look a lot like George and Norma Strait. Was that intentional? Where did you shoot that video?

CB: No. I didn't notice "George and Norma"! HA It was probably my brother, Brian. We shot that in Sealy. So long ago, but sometimes it seems like yesterday.

N-T: We're running a contest to give away two tickets to your Bossier City show. The event has attracted a lot of attention. You have some really loyal fans. What is it you want them to take away from your performances?

CB: I want people to laugh, sing along and have a good time. As far as "take-away," I'd like them to feel like they escaped for a little while, whatever stresses the world brings to their lives each day.

N-T: You have had a long and successful marriage to actress Lisa Hartman – a rarity in Nashville *and* Hollywood. Care to share your secret with our readers?

CB: Communication is the secret. Or as Roy Rogers put it; "Don't ever go to bed angry." That's the only way you can "grow together" and not apart.

N-T: What's it like being the father of a teenager – Lily Pearl Black – in 2014? Any advice for other dads?

CB: I'm hardly in a position to give advice! But, here it is: Pay attention and be the one who explains the world to them. If you don't, there's no telling who will.

N-T: What's next after your tour ends?

CB: I'm working hard to get a new CD out. It's hard to know when that will happen, but I'm threatening to do it this summer!

N-T: If there's anything else you'd like to talk about, please feel free to add it here.

CB: I do a lot of work with IRSF, International Rett Syndrome Foundation. Chideo.com is a great place to help out.

Editor's Note: Rett syndrome is a rare genetic disorder that affects the way the brain

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develops. It is almost exclusively found in girls. According to Barry Rinehart from the International Rett Syndrome Foundation, Rett's is on the far end of the autism spectrum and is a mutation of the X chromosome, which is why it mostly affects girls.

"My niece Courtney, my brother Kevin's daughter, was afflicted with and lost her battle with it at age 16," Black said during a CNN interview in October 2013.

Tickets are \$40 for floor level and \$50 for club level via Ticketmaster. Tickets are also available at the Margaritaville Retail Store.

To watch the official video of "Killin' Time," log onto: <http://youtu.be/Fj4DsnKQvEY>

To watch Black honor a fallen soldier, log onto:

<http://youtu.be/9rO1Styk9ys>

To win two tickets to Black's show and dinner for two at the World Tour in Margaritaville, like and share our contest post on: <https://www.facebook.com/myssnewscom>