

The red dirt country music

Countries, United States



Introduction

Country music has evolved and changed over the past decades, but one genre that can be overlooked the most is red dirt. Red dirt is not as popular as the classics such as Garth Brooks or George Strait or even the new generation of Luke Bryan or Florida Georgia Line. Whenever you go to a dance hall or a bar you might hear artists such as Stoney LaRue, Cross Canadian Ragweed, and Turnpike Troubadours, these are just a few of the red dirt artist that has put a dot on the map of this uprising genre of country music. The history behind how they got red dirt is one that you would not expect to think of. One artist that stands out is Casey Donahew, he writes most of his songs to be true to life and we can all relate to. The album chosen was by Aaron Watson called " Real Good Times", this album has many songs that have hit the charts and are very meaningful. The song that was chosen was by Steve Earle " Copperhead Road", this song is very popular, that is heard in bars and dance halls all over.

Between Oklahoma and Texas

To begin with " The Farm" where red dirt was born, this beautiful scenery sits just outside Stillwater, Oklahoma on 149 acres. It was started back in the 1980s when aspiring artist would rent out the rooms and live on the property cheaply so they would create and play their music. Red dirt is geographically described as the land that is between Oklahoma and Texas where there is iron-rich soil and resembles the color red. There are many of what is considered the founding fathers of the farm, many have passed, but a few are still alive such as Jason Boland. The late Jimmy LaFave recorded an

album called "Texoma", this created a scene in which he was just trying to establish that he had planted his roots in Austin and Stillwater. He was trying to get people to see how much Texas and Oklahoma music was similar and joining the music. Today you can find an artist that lives in Texas and Oklahoma creating music in the red dirt genre. Texoma is a way to honor the ones who originated the red dirt music and includes artist from Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, and even some in Missouri. You can also find festivals being performed each year including FarmFest, WoodyFest, ShrineFest, as well as many others. The one main obstacle they face is they do not want to be under the Nashville music row scene, they want to make the music because they enjoy it, they do not want to become rich and famous off it. (Saving Country Music)

Music and Lyrics

During the forming of the style of the red dirt, music is taken from many different areas, the main one is the acoustic guitar. You can also hear the electric guitar, steel guitar, slide guitar, bass, percussion, piano, baritone guitar, banjo, accordion, fiddle, as well as the harmonica. With all these different instruments you can get a wide variety of music from your basic country, to rock and roll, as well as a blues or even grassy feel. The artist would use lyrics that they felt would benefit and be more relatable to their fans. The themes of the lyrics may have a feel of stereotypical, but they have a unique origin. There is also a variety of country, rock, honky-tonk, blues, and western swing. (bonfirethoughts)

Casey Donahew

Uniquely Casey Donahew is a Burleson, Texas native who grew up on a farm and listening to his grandfather play and sings country songs, his grandfather gave Donahew his first guitar, and everything else just came naturally. When he started playing, he was fond of the '80s and 90's side of the country music. A few of his favorite artists were Garth Brooks and Pat Green who wrote a lot of their songs and that is what he wanted to do; he would relate to the stories being told through their songs. After Donahew went to the University of Texas he started to go shows where some of the red dirt artists were playing and it did not take him long to start trying his songs that he has been writing for the last few years. Within a few years of playing, Donahew released his first album, one of his songs "stockyards" became an instant hit, he was able to get a spot at Billy Bob's and he nearly got 4000 fans to see his show and after that, it grew from there and his career took off. " Hopefully I've grown as a songwriter over the past few years, but I don't try to get too carried away with it, I don't want to want to try to be too serious about everything". After he came out with his third album, it sold over thirty-two thousand copies and his career spread even further. Donahew now plays at sold-out shows all over the Midwest, he continues to create songs for the fan sensations and ones that everyone can sing along to at his shows. (caseydonahew). " Most of us have families with kids. We don't want to be gone away from home for that long. Not a lot of bands on self-owned albums debuting at 28 on the country charts We've done everything ourselves. We don't have a record deal. It just proves to everyone out there that you can do it on your own, you don't need a record

company behind you.’ (countrystandardtime). The one thing Donahew keeps in the red dirt tradition is that he is not out there for the money, but he is there for the fans.

Aaron Watson

Furthermore, the West Texas native Aaron Watson produced his first album in 1991 without the help of any label company “ I wanted to give my fans something special, there are 20 songs for the 20 years I have been doing this, I worked hard, I just couldn’t hardly even sleep. I went in, and I made this album with the mindset that this is the last one. I hope that it’s not. I don’t think it will be, but God only knows. We may not be here tomorrow. We should all live life with the mindset that today might be the last day. It makes you look at things differently. That sunrise you saw this morning, you might have paid a little more attention to it if you knew you’d never see another one again. Those loved ones that you pass in the hallway, you might not pass them, you might stop and hug them if you knew, ‘ I may not have this moment again.” (popculture). Twenty years later he produced one his favorite and yet most challenging album. The “ Red Bandana” album was either going to be a hit or going to down quick, it was a raw album. The first song did not have a chorus and the second song was only instrumental, to the third song being completely upbeat and one you have jammed out to. With this album, Watson wrote about some of the guys that he admired the most but in a discrete way. He wrote red bandana for his dad and granddad. The red bandana represents the one his father gave him who is a disabled veteran. The album sold nearly 10, 000 and after the first week, there were over two million streams.

Steve Earle

Despite Steve Earle creating “copperhead road” in 1988 with over 500,000 units sold. Earle did not know at the time that there was a road in East Tennessee that had that name and it was a famous road from two generations prior. He had written the song after spending the day in jail after an altercation with the police. The road in Tennessee was a road they used to transport moonshine in Johnson county. The resemblance that some see in the song is one the song title is about the transportation of something illegal and two the meaning behind the song is a story of a soldier who returns home from Vietnam and starts trafficking marijuana. (songfacts). After he wrote the song at one point the country where the road was at was trying to take legal actions against him because it was sparking uproar over what the history was. Earle was a drug addict and he wrote most of his songs while he was under the influence, by 1991 he was homeless due to his addiction problem. “We could see this as a hopeless situation that we’re in right now, but I’m a recovering heroin addict. I cannot afford to believe in hopeless cases or lost causes because I was just that”. (webir). After writing the song and going to jail he finally got help, “copperhead road” inspired him to get help and try to make sure others got help as well.

The Symbol of Red Dirt

According to CMT editorial director Chet Flippo, he like many have not heard of red dirt music, or they have and just not truly realized what it is. He looked up the dean of Texas music writers who stated, “I’ve heard the term, but it is not part of the vocabulary”. Steve Greene who owns the Snorty Horse Saloon in Missouri believes that red dirt music is “is a bunch of artists that

are kind of pissed off at the top 40 country. They don't want to talk and walk to walk. They don't want people to tell them who to play with and how to wear their hair". Brooks and Dunn wrote and produced a song " Red Dirt Road" according to Ronnie Dunn the song meant that " This is red dirt country. The red dirt road is just a symbolic of those experiences, there's that end where you start, you end down there, and between here and there is life". Flippo took the definitions he found and relates it the progressive country music that has been around for over thirty years, but it is just now starting to take off and make its mark on country music. (Flippo, CMT).

People Just Like Us

A University of Kentucky student wrote back in 2018 what seems like the best way to describe the impact red dirt music has on people. Megan Parsons wrote " basically, red dirt doesn't sound like a pop star put on a pair of boots and barfed up a couple of country words like " truck" or " red dirt". She goes on explaining that she does like country music and there is a lot of good artists out there, but red dirt is people just like us. She explains in her words, " hardworking, family-oriented who want to spread a message with the music they sing. If you've ever been to an Aaron Watson, Cody Johnson, or Turnpike Troubadours concert, they'll tell you that music should have a meaning. It should allow you to recall memories and you should relate to its lyrics, real country music does this, and red dirt artist is bringing it back". (Parsons, odyssey).

Red dirt musicians wanted to write music and perform them in front of their fans but did not want to be tired up in the Nashville standards or scene, they

did want they wanted to do and how they wanted to do it. Some of the founding fathers of the red dirt genre started with Steve Ripley, he was one of the lead singers from “ the tractors”, at the time red dirt had not come into play but Steve knew his songs were some type of country. Jimmy LaFave started singing about red dirt lifestyles and was heard at open mics and he evolved from there. Bob Childers was of the first red dirt poet laureate, he helped define the red dirt genre. The red dirt rangers started 1979 on the farm writing and singing some of the red dirt music. These are just a few that have impacted the red dirt genre they all either grew up or moved to Stillwater Oklahoma to write music and many started their careers the farm that had been previously talked about. (wideopencountry).

Conclusion

In conclusion, red dirt music has been around for a long time but may not have been as popular as the rest of country music. A lot of country music comes out of Nashville and with record labels and more popularity. The artist who goes to Nashville wants the big record deals and some may want the more money that comes with it. The artist of red dirt does not think so much of the money and popularity with it, they just want to make music and make their fans happy.