

Hill Country Picnic 2010

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[0:00:07] Colburn states his name and the fact that he is a singer and harmonica player for the Hill Country Revue.

[0:00:31] Colburn talks about the formation of his band, the Hill Country Revue. He explains that the band formed when Cody Dickinson (of the North Mississippi Allstars) decided to start the band as a side project when Cody's brother, Luther Dickinson (also of the North Mississippi Allstars) was playing with the Black Crowes. Colburn says that what started as a side-project became "a full-time gig" for himself and the rest of the band. Colburn mentions that he met Cody and Luther threw a mutual friend Aaron Julison (who plays with Kid Rock). Julison produced Colburn's first record, *Dixie Hustler*, in Detroit. Colburn states that he really didn't start listening to blues music until the early 90s, when he listened to R.L. Burnside, Junior Kimbrough, and Fred McDowell. Aside from B.B. King, Colburn asserts that the Hill Country sound was, "the first blues I heard" and he says that the North Mississippi blues was the first to really "hit" him. This love of Hill Country blues made Colburn accept Cody's offer to join the Hill Country Revue. Because of this, Colburn quit his job and moved from Flint, Michigan to Memphis (where he lives today). He says that the Hill Country sound "means a lot" to him.

[0:02:08] Colburn explains that the Hill Country sound appeals to him because it is "hypnotic" and is like "a trance music." He says that when he first heard it, it "spoke" to him. He says that while the Chicago blues was very popular where he grew up, he didn't "feel" Chicago blues as much as he did when listening to Hill Country blues. He asserts that he can relate to the Hill Country blues songs, because the artists tell "stories that I had been through, personally." He calls Hill Country blues music, "overwhelming" and says that he "got lost in it...that's all I wanted to listen to for a very long time. I'm still listening to it."

[0:03:49] Colburn states that he knows why it took so long for Hill Country blues to catch on. He explains the popularity of the Hill Country blues for the punk rock, sharing how he was a part of the punk rock scene. He explains that when Fat Possum and Epitaph Records released Hill Country blues records (especially R.L. Burnside records), they opened up the market for a whole new audience, which included Coburn, himself. This was because Epitaph Records, and to a lesser degree Fat Possum Records, were punk labels (he mentions two punk bands, Bad Religion, and NOFX who were signed to Epitaph). So, when these labels put out blues, he and his friends "were just eating it up," because, the North Mississippi blues sound, "something completely different on this label that we had bought everything else on. Colburn calls the North Mississippi sound, "real," adding that "the Delta blues is real, but the North Mississippi Hill Country blues is as real as it gets...it's got a bit of country flavor to it. It's humble...it's just flat out good, genuine, honest, music."

[0:05:20] Colburn asserts that the reason that it took twenty years (until the early 90s) to pair blues with punk was not a racial one. Rather, he believes that punk rock is an "angry form of the blues...it's fast, in your face. It's political... Whereas Hill Country blues is more personal. It's angry, but it's a subtle anger that you don't blow your top over. You just tell it how it is. You have the blues for a reason, and sometimes you shouldn't get angry about it." He thinks that it took so long to fuse punk

and Hill Country blues together, because no one was “paying attention to the details... they are very similar.” Colburn says that when Epitaph and Fat Possum started pairing punk with Hill Country blues, “it clicked” and Colburn says, “I’m glad it did. It pulled me in.”

[0:07:01] Regarding the decreasing number of young blacks listening to blues music, Colburn asserts that “there really are no boundaries unless people think about the boundaries, then that’s when the boundaries start coming up.” He calls music today a “70s era” where “rap and hip-hop have become the new disco...it’s on every radio station, it’s kind of thrown at you.” Yet, he insists that the blues “aren’t thrown at you” and that you “pick up on,” “seek out” or “never know about” the blues. He says that this is not a “boundary,” but wishes that more people would seek out and listen to the blues and “let it get into your soul.” He calls today’s popular music, “kind of soulless,” and again insists that, for the most part, the blues and R&B have “soul.”

[0:08:31] Colburn explains the importance of festivals like the Hill Country Picnic, with regards to maintaining an audience for blues music, because such festivals “throw” blues at you. Colburn believes that blues could once again become popular if a label or a popular artist (he mentions Ludacris and Jay-Z as examples) followed Epitaph’s formula and released a blues album. He explains that some genre-bending is already occurring, and cites the fact that Charlie Musselwhite is playing with Cyndi Lauper. He says that the blues “are coming back in a way” because a lot of people are putting out blues albums. He reiterates the importance of Cyndi Lauper’s new blues-influenced music, because she has been on TV (on *The Apprentice*) and can give the music more exposure. As a disclaimer, Colburn asserts that while this music, is “not necessarily the best blues in the world, but it is the blues. So, I think it’s a good thing...It’s kind of working its way out.”

[0:10:35] Colburn relates how “Uncle” Jim Dickinson used to say that “Memphis is part of North Miss-- It’s where the stages are.” He relates how he came to Memphis four years ago from Flint, Michigan, where the blues is popular. There, Colburn mentions he played with Larry McCray every Monday night at a juke joint. Colburn says that McCray taught him “when to play the harmonica, when not to” telling him, “play it as a horn, don’t play it as, ‘Look what I can do....’ I’ll ask you to get off the stage.” Colburn explains how when he moved to Memphis, he was invited into the Dickinson home and family dinners, because he had “sacrificed so much, moving down here [to Memphis].” He says that the Burnside’s have also opened up for him, citing the kindness of Duwayne and Garry and how he was invited to Alice May’s birthday party. He calls the kindness of these families, “a big, generous hug...and it shows that music is a universal language, whether you’re from the North, whether you’re from the South, East, or West. Italy, we were over in Italy and people understood...what we were doing.” Of the North Mississippi and Memphis artists, Colburn asserts, “a family is a family, and we have a big, strong family.”

[0:12:42] Regarding the family connections in Hill Country blues, Colburn calls the music, “humble...it’s not flashy, it’s nothing fancy at all. It’s, ‘This is my guitar, these are the drums, this is the bass.’” Colburn feels that people in the North Mississippi scene are doing what they think is “right... You get people together and it just comes out.” He ends by quoting Fred McDowell, calling the music “a sweet natural thing.”

[0:13:25] Interview ends.