



Shawna Russell

Mak'n it Happen

by Cheryl Standage

"People are always blaming circumstances for what they are.

I don't believe in circumstances.

The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and, if they can't find them, make them."

G.B. Shaw, Mrs. Warren's Profession, 1893.

In a recent interview, Country Music Association's "Who New to Watch" artist and rising Oklahoma singer/songwriter, Shawna Russell, speaks with the confidence of a veteran who has paid some serious dues.

Asked when her talent was first discovered, Russell reminisces back to the age of seven, when her aunt needed a solo performer for a production at her church. Russell stated that she had "no problem"

learning the lines and the songs. From that point on, with the support of her family, her talent and desire to perform, there was no stopping the talented singer.

Russell, however, did not make it overnight. She recalls performing with her father, Keith Russell, at benefits for school and church before joining him in his band, *Last Chance*, by the time she was thirteen. By her late teens she was fronting the band. Russell took her junior year of high school off from performing, but by her senior year was

soloing and filling in with her uncle, Tim Russell's band, *Way Out West*. She officially joined the band after graduating from high school and stayed in the band while in college. It soon became evident to Russell that she needed to go on the road full-time and so with great expectations and courage she traded her books in for wheels and took to the road. Her father took a year off from his coaching and teaching job, and that was the beginning of a 78 straight week road tour performing in Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, New Mexico, Colorado, South Dakota and Canada. Piece of cake...right?

Shawna recalls that it was "less than glamorous conditions" traveling around the country with four guys in a van! Russell further states that "some would have crumbled under the pressure." Clif Doyal, of the Clif Doyal Agency in Nashville, their booking agent at the time, kept them very busy. (The company has been instrumental in the careers of many developing and major country recording artists, including Toby Keith, Lonestar, and Little Texas, among others)

During her professional career, Russell has toured across much of the U.S., performing two to six nights a week, up to five sets a night, at many of the top live music clubs on the circuit including the Grizzly Rose, in Denver, Billy Bob's in Ft. Worth, and the Wildhorse Saloon, in Nashville. She also performed in Canada and spent three years fronting and playing guitar in fellow Oklahoman, Ty England's band (of Garth Brook's fame), which included a USO Tour of Korea in 2005.

Continuing with the mind set to "make it happen," in 2007 Russell and her Uncle Tim (now serving as her producer/co-manager), began working on *GODDESS*, her debut CD, which was recorded in Oklahoma City. Russell co-wrote 12 of the 13 songs on the project. In 2008, the family pair reunited with Doyal (now acting as co-manager/publicist) and, in her own words, "took a leap of faith" and began her own record company called *Way Out West Records* in 2008. In a short time, Russell was introduced with the single, "Goddess," and she began touring radio stations across the country.

By this time, her reputation as a world-class talent had already caught the attention of many folks in the music industry. Prior to the release of the CD, Shawna made her national television debut on the popular show "Inside Music Row," and the COUNTRY MUSIC ASSOCIATION named her as one of their "Who's New to Watch in 2008" artists.

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