



Interview: Heidi Duss / Foto: Marco Duss

Interview with Gregg Aaron Brown, Nashville 09.06.2013

Can you please interduce yourself, who you are?

My name is Gregg Aaron Brown, formerly Gregory Brown.

How did you become a producer?

I came to Nashville at a fortunate time. I moved here from Duluth Minnessota in January 1985. I grew up playing country music with my father, he had a country band. I started playing guitar with him when I was fourteen and played with my dad for about five years, we played two to four nights a week. It was a great education, particularly when it came to country music. I started to make a brake for it and came down to Nashville in January 1985. I finished my BA degree in a college here in Nashville called Belmont and was fortunate enough, to get my foot in the door at Warner Brothers Nashville. I did odd jobs for a while, working in different departements, radio promotions and ANR. But the real turning point for me was, when I was working with a producer that was cutting records in house, a gentleman called Barry Beckett, he was a part of the rythm music show, the rythm section, a great keyboard player. I was fortunate enough to book his sessions, listen to songs, just basically getting things ready for his recording sessions. So I became more involved with that environment and was meeting all the great studio players and songwriters in Nashville. Working with Barry really was the turning point for me. Not long after that, I wanted to produce records as well. We were really fortunate, at the time, we had a small studio at Warner Brothers on the second floor that Jim Ed Norman had created, Jim Ed was the Head at Warner Brothers Nashville. I

checked into the studio on weekends, cutting whatever I could, I had met an individual when I was finishing my degree at Belmont, by the name of Chris Austin. Chris was just a fantastic multi instrumentalist from Boone North Carolina. He went on the Road to play with Ricky Skaggs as part of his band. We became friends and he eventually contacted me, wanting to record some of his own records and pursue a solo career. We went upstairs on a Saturday and we cut Delmore Brothers' song called „Blues Stay Away From Me“. There was me playing acoustic, Chris on acoustic, Dave Pomeroy was on upright bass and my cousin Jack Purcell played drums. Jack is now head of promotions at Big Machine Records. As a result of cutting those songs, we got Chris a deal at Warner Brothers as an artist and I did a producer contract, they gave me a guarantee, I had a little more courtage for looking for acts, starting acts, these kind of things. That was kind of the beginning of my production career. Not long after that, I came across some recordings that an artist out of Atlanta Georgia had done, his name was Travis Tritt, I listened to those sides and I thought this guy is really great. There was just a little more edge to his tonality. Not long after that, we were able to sign Travis and we started the process to get ready and produce records with him as well.

Do the artists usually come to you or do you contact them?

It works both ways, you keep your ears and eyes open. You try to stay active and try to find artists and music that excites you. The door gets knocked on both sides.

What is it like to be a producer, is it difficult?

Business has changed so much, it seems like during the 90's, it was a real kind of a heyday for Nashville. There was a lot of money being spent and a lot of acts getting signed. Most of the major labels split off into sister labels, so there was a lot of activity at that time. I guess, I never really found the process difficult at all. I mean you had certain challenges at times, working with certain artists and maybe some temperament, but I was very fortunate to work with great people and all kinds of singers and artists.

Do you prefer certain music styles to others?

I like working with really expressionistic soulful singers, particularly those that write their own material. I find it really tends to translate into things, being more personal while at the same time, it's also an enjoyable process because there are so many great songwriters here in Nashville, as there has been for decades. Working with artists who don't tend to write as much of their own material, creates enough for me to really connect with music row songwriters and publishers and try to find great songs to make great records. You can take a good song and make a good record, and you can take a great song and make a great record. Both aspects are really enjoyable. I guess tonally I tend to grab a take towards one of two things, really hard, traditional country to things that are more edgier in the lines of Hank Jr. and Waylon and things that have a little sharper edge to it. I guess I don't particularly enjoy so much the contemporary aspect of where country music is right now. I tend to be either wide left, or wide right.

I noticed, that you have produced CD's that have won double and triple platinum awards.

I have been fortunate to work with some great acts. You take your time to try to get the right record together that transpires. In the marketplace it's always kind of a fine line between art and commerce. You try to be artistic at the same time as in business to sell music. Just try to do your best to cover both aspects of what drives you in this business.

Do you also produce other styles of music or just country music?

I produce whatever excites me. I love great rock'n roll, blues and traditional country. I'm just getting ready to release a record on a rock'n roll band out of Louisville Kentucky called the Bluestown, which is a throwback to your earlyer classic Rock. I just like things that are simple in groove for the most part.

Are you working on a project right now?

Yes, me and my partner Isak Levi have initiated a series of live shows called Branded Nashville. Initially, we're really focusing on artists who have a great independent spirit and first and foremost have really helped to brand Nashville to the great community that it is, when it comes to diversity of musical genres. Associated with Revelator Recordings, our Production Company and Independent Label, we've created „Branded Nashville“ and have been doing a series of live shows. Below our creative compound, there is a live entertainment venue downtown Nashville, called the Rutledge. So we're running that series twice a month and incorporating great music from hillbilly country, rock 'n' roll to blues and americana. we're recording every show live, multi track and filming everything. Over the course of the rest of the year, we will be creating different compilations associated with those shows. It's just partnering up with some businesses here in Nashville. Between businesses, our sponsors, supporters and the artists, it really creates a great environment for light modern people and musicians as well as a great networking opportunity for those involved.

Are you still with Warner Brothers?

No, I was with Warner Brothers in the 90's, but I'm an independent producer now for about 15 years.

Do you have your own studio here?

Yes, we have a great little creative compound off 4th avenue south, associated with a live entertainment venue called the Rutledge. I do a lot of pre-production and over dubs. I still use other studios here in Nashville for tracking. I worked a lot in a studio in Franklin Tennessee called The Castle, one of my favorite places here in Nashville, a great residential studio, it sits on about 46 acres and is very peaceful. I still do mixing in RN studios in Memphis with my buddy John Hampton, as well as doing some tracking in a studio over in Berry Hill called Treasure Island. So over the years, you kind of develop your approach in the people, venues and studios that can really induce in making things roll in a pleasurable, creative process.