



Music to singer/songwriter Preston James has never been about fame or notoriety. Music isn't a hobby or just a way to make a living. Music is as essential to him as food, air and water. That may seem like an exaggeration but one only has to spend five minutes with this 21 year-old professed "music nerd" to understand nothing else drives or defines him. Whether it's listening to, reading or talking about, singing or playing, writing or recording, alone or in front of a crowd; music is *the* force that moves James forward.

A wicked guitarist with a soulful voice, James has spent countless nights since he was 14 years old onstage at The Wildhorse Saloon, Ole Red, ACME Feed & Seed, Country Music Hall of Fame and others in the historic Nashville Downtown District. He performed with Delbert McClinton during his Sandy Beaches Cruise, Vince Gill invited him to sit in with the Grammy award winning Time Jumpers and he received two standing ovations from a sold-out Ryman Auditorium crowd as the opener for The Brian Setzer Orchestra.

The best way to describe Preston James would be this: REAL country music, mixed with a bit of blues, a slice of outlaw and peppered with some classic rock. James draws much of his inspiration from musical heroes of the past - Merle Haggard, Waylon Jennings, Patsy Cline and Stevie Ray Vaughn as well as living legends Vince Gill, George Strait and newer artists Chris Stapleton, Sturgill Simpson and Brothers Osborne. "I love the story telling of country, the soul of the blues and the passion of rock."

Born and raised just outside of Nashville in Cheatham County, Preston has grown up with a closer look than most at the music industry. With his father, a former tour manager and his mother, a country music publicist, James grew up amongst some of the top recording artists in country music. Naomi Judd was his "God Mother" and Miranda Lambert even baby sat him a time or two. He was, however, more enamored with their band and musicians than the stars themselves and knows it's not just the talent, but the soul you have to invest to have life-long career. It can't just be *something* you do but it has to be *what* you do. It's that unbridled passion that has accelerated his musical development and surprised listeners when they realize his age.

James signed a writing deal with Downtown Music Publishing at 18 but none of what he has achieved can be considered an overnight accomplishment as he's been "noodling" on

his guitar since he could walk and he wrote his first song at age 7. While it was his Dad who taught him some basic chords and a few Tom Petty tunes, it wasn't long until Preston was working with a variety of mentors not because his parents pushed him but because they couldn't get him to do anything else.

"I'd work with a country guy one week, a jazz guy one week, and a blues guy some other time. I like to soak up as much as I can and honestly, I think that has a lot to do with my sound. When I was a kid I started guitar lessons with a rock guy and then with a jazz professor for a while. I don't play jazz very well but I learned a lot."

Music was very much James saving grace. Not very interested in sports and challenged by ADHD, Preston always had a hard time feeling comfortable at school. It was only in music that Preston has ever felt like he could comfortably be himself.

"I have never loved anything like I love music. There are plenty of girls and cool cars and all sorts of things but my guitar will always be my best friend. I had a hard time with school but when I didn't have friends, I had my guitar. It never moved, it never left me and it has always done right by me."

James' first love is Holly but she may not be what you would envision. "I knew Holly was mine from the moment I played her in the store - A 1957 Gibson J-50 I bought on Holly Street in East Nashville. I busted my butt playing gigs and saving until I could afford her."

It's the past that has captured Preston's heart the most whether in vintage guitars, classic music, legendary artists or historic venues. "I said a million times growing up, '...if I can ever play the Ryman, I'll honestly be done. I won't need to do anything else in my musical career.' Now that I've done it though I'm like '...yeah, I spoke too soon because I'm not done!'"

No, he's not done. Not by a long shot...