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November 11, 2002

'I'M ALWAYS TRYING TO EXPLORE'

The country superstar Shania Twain talks about music, life in Switzerland and pretty women

SHE'S ACHIEVED first-name-only superstardom, selling more than 50 million records on the strength of her twangy pop tunes and unabashedly sexy image. On Nov. 19, Shania Twain releases *Up!*, her first album of new material since 1997's *Come On Over*. The Timmins, Ont.-born songstress, 37, who now lives in a 19th-century chateau outside Montreux, Switzerland, with her husband and creative collaborator Robert "Mutt" Lange and their 15-month-old son Eja, spoke with Jonathon Gatehouse.

Photo: Courtesy of Universal Music



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Shania Twain

Is there anything special about the timing of this record, five years after the last one?

It's just ready now. It probably would have been ready a year earlier had I not had the child. But that sort of delayed things a bit. It's only been two and a half years since I've been off the road. So in two and a half years, we wrote and recorded an album and had a baby. In the end, it really hasn't been that long.

Why did you call the album *Up!* ?

I have always tried to affect people in a positive way. I want my music to be uplifting, for the listeners and for myself, because I have to go out there and perform it and live with it, day after day, for months on end. With this album, we were right in the middle of the whole thing when Sept. 11 happened. We had already written *Up!* and I thought, wow, that's the perfect title, we really do need to stay up. More than anything, people need -- I don't want to say a diversion, but some release and relief. A positive distraction from all the anxieties everyone is experiencing.

What about the writing and recording process? Did you and Mutt record at home?

We travelled a lot. I find it difficult to concentrate at home. I get into domestic mode and I'm more worried about what I'm going to make for dinner. When we feel like we need a surge of creativity, we just get in the car, or hop on the train and go close by in Europe -- Paris a lot, and Milan, a few places. We just find it easier to go visit a museum and then go have a nice dinner and think about what to write as opposed to who's calling and what we need at the store.

Has having Eja affected the way you approach your music?

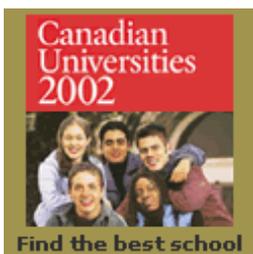
It's changed me emotionally, and my emotions always go into my music. But I didn't write anything specifically about him, or change my direction. I write things to suit my voice, I write things to suit my personality because I want people to get to know me through my music. Having a child hasn't changed that.

Do you write for yourself, or do you have someone else in mind when you compose?

I try to write songs that I know people can relate to. I want people to get out of music



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what I get out of music. It can make me feel sad, happy, everything. I like to be that in people's lives as well.

What made you decide to leave the United States and move to Switzerland?

Privacy, for the most part. I really can live a normal life here. I come home off the road and I'm just another person on the street. That's invaluable when you're somebody who has a high profile pretty much everywhere else. I do my own groceries, I take Eja to the park. I just go everywhere and nobody blinks an eye. They take a lot of pride in their discretion here. And a lot of celebrities live here for that reason.

Switzerland was one of those countries where I could manage all that and it was a place that has snow. I was missing snow before, when I was living in Nashville and in Florida. The mountains are gorgeous. There's great skiing. There's a lot of lakes here. It's not that different from Canada in a lot of ways. Even in the fact that we live in the French part of the country.

How is your French?

It's fairly good. I make a lot of mistakes, but I can completely get by.

Do you worry about keeping in touch with your North American fan base or your roots?

No, it's so global now. We've got the Net, we've got television. We've got corporate America that is everywhere. It's not like you're cut off. And as an international artist you spend your time travelling around the world, so you're never in North America any longer than you are anywhere else. It's irrelevant.

People ask me about my family -- do you feel removed from them? The answer is no, because I was always travelling anyway, so I see them just as often as I did.

What do you miss about Canada?

Northern Ontario is unique. I don't know whether it's just because I'm from there, but I just have a connection. The wilderness is very special. I'll always enjoy going back there to visit that.

And of course there are certain treats I miss from Canada -- Goodies, those licorice candies, they're really hard to find anywhere else. My sister always brings me those. Black licorice pipes -- I love those -- and you can't find them anywhere else. The Kit Kats don't taste the same anywhere else but in Canada. It's the little things like that.

One of the new songs, Not Just Another Pretty Face, has lyrics that make it sound like a bit of a feminist anthem. "She's an astronaut, a valet at the parking lot, a farmer working the land . . . She's not just a pretty face." Is that a reaction to the way you've been perceived over the years?

It relates to me, but that's not why I wrote it. There was a time when I felt more like a cover than content, but I don't really feel that way anymore. The song is just about women in general who often don't get taken seriously if they happen to be pretty. There is just so much more to us than that.

Is humour an important part of your songwriting?

Oh yeah. I always like to put a little bit of a twist. Take something like [another new song] I'm Gonna Getcha Good. Normally you would say that if you were mad at somebody, or going to get back at somebody. But in this song it's about love.

You've had a remarkably successful career up to this point. Do you still have ambitions?

My goals change all the time. But there are always songs to write, there are always subjects to cover, there are always emotions to express. I'll never run out of that.

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I'm always trying to explore new things and find different ways to express the same emotions, because life is pretty repetitive actually. We're always experiencing the same few emotions, every day. If you're a creative person then you have to find a unique way to express that.

When you say "a unique way," does that mean we'll see a Shania Twain jazz album or a Shania Twain classical album in the years to come?

I don't know, but I am very versatile. I've always liked classical music, but I don't know if I'd ever go as far as that. There are so many things you experience in life that inspire you to go in a different direction, and who knows what will influence my music?

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