

# BRIAN WHELAN

With instrumental abilities that made him a key member of Dwight Yoakam's band, a voice reminiscent of Jackson Browne and a Top 10 lyrical streak that makes him seem like he's been writing hook-laden hits for years - **Brian Whelan** is poised to attract a much wider audience with the release of his second solo album *Sugarland*.

**Whelan**, who majored in music at USC, plays almost anything with keys or strings -- steel guitar, accordion, piano. On *Sugarland*, he truly puts his skills to the test, playing just about every musical instrument possible on these crisp, clean, streamlined, mostly mid-tempo pop rock tunes that go straight to the heart with a sonic sense that recalls the heyday of great radio.

Co-Produced by fellow Yoakamite, drummer **Mitch Marine**, alongside bassist **Lee Pardini**, *Sugarland* boldly throws **Whelan's** hat into a ring crowded with the likes of John Fullbright, Sturgill Simpson, Mike Stinson, and Jason Isbell. His jangling, straight-ahead tunes like "Sugarland", "Talk To Me" and "We Got It All," serve notice, right out of the box, that **Whelan's** grown as a songwriter, arranger, and vocalist.

After the summery, top-down lilt of the pop tunes, **Whelan** takes it to another level with a wry, you-lookin'-at-me, back-hand slap at a genre that he believes is mostly bloated milquetoast these days. "Americana" is his jet-blast of defiance, a withering critique of a genre overrun with Civil War outfits, mountain man beards, Deliverance-style overalls, vintage dresses, cowgirl boots, and de rigeur phoney hillbilly nasal intonation. **Whelan** lays bare all the calculated looks and half-hearted music with a blistering guitar behind his hell-fire-and-brimstone sarcasm: "C'mon, man, you gotta make the scene / with your big bass drum and your tambourine / You can sell it for a million dollars." Whelan's lyrics take a sharper turn when he tells the ultimate truth: "You're a pretty nice guy but you sound like shit."

**Whelan** adds to the sarcasm with a blistering Scruggs-inspired banjo solo by veteran LA picker Herb Pedersen over the punkish rock that makes the song and the sentiment come full circle. Even so, Americana radio is going to have a hard time ignoring this unstoppable and instantly likeable blazer.

But for all the fun of his rockers, **Whelan** frequently displays a rare gift for capturing the serious, the lyrical epitaph of the flailing relationship. On the brooding track, "Sucker Punch", he warns, "I've got a sick sense of humor and I'm sure you know / I'm a sucker puncher when I get this low." The fatalistic "bombs away, bombs away" chorus is pure California country rock of the highest order.

On "The Only Thing," **Whelan** locates a cool, Buddy Holly-fronting-The-Clash urgency in this radio-friendly rocker. The track's narrator laments how he "tried to run with a

different crowd but I just kept falling down / A change of clothes and a new routine / Wound up right right back here at the beginning” It’s a perfect example of a rocker love song. Jackson Browne should be charting with this tune.

Another *Sugarland* highlight is the lazy country rocker, “Number One Fan”. **Whelan** sketches the borderline-rabid superfans that guys like Yoakam contend with everywhere they go – One must balance an artists desire to please his fans with maintaining some degree of privacy. Judging from the lyrics, **Whelan** has heard just about every variation on this theme in his own tenure with Yoakam and others.

The album is a natural extension of **Whelan’s** way under-appreciated debut, *Decider*, and with its radio-friendliness, *Sugarland* should go far in spreading the word about **Whelan** and his ever growing importance on the Los Angeles scene and across the country as well. The world will soon know that **Whelan** and *Sugarland* are the real deal.

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