

SHOW

GRILL

PHOTOGRAPHS:

**DANIELLE
LEVITT**

SHANIATWAIN heads back to Las Vegas next year for her third residency. Is she sweating it? Nah, finds Jessica Prupas

SHANIA TWAIN



So ME

artists spend their Vegas residency ordering bottle service and booking tables at Carbone. Not Shania Twain. “I get to ride my horses in the desert,” she tells me dreamily when I ask about her run of shows on the Strip next year. “I get to wake up to them in the morning and then go to the stage in the evening. It couldn’t be a more comfortable performance set-up.”

Essentially, it’s not really that different from her life in Switzerland, where she’s calling me from. I catch her on her farm, where the internet connection is shoddy and her beloved horses are kept nearby in their stables. She looks Moncler-meets-Ontario chic in her living room, dressed in a camo baseball cap, half-zip jumper and leggings. Behind her, through the enormous sash window, towering pine trees lap up the clean Swiss air.

Shania has lived permanently in Switzerland for over three decades. Even during the height of her fame – through the late 90s and early 2000s, when she was obliterating album sale records and dominating MTV in head-to-toe leopard print – she was swaddled in the quiet safety of the Alps. In between world tours and a Super Bowl performance, she’d return to leafy Corseaux, where she was doing a lot of the things she might have done if she’d never left small-town Canada: falling in love, raising a kid, falling out of love, getting divorced, falling back in love, dealing with long-term illness, riding her horses. She’s basically had the most success you could ever hope to have as a singer – she is a cultural icon and one of the bestselling artists of all time, who’s revered for helping to popularise country-pop and giving the world the phrase, “Let’s go, girls!” But she’s always experienced it at arm’s length.

“During that period I was so busy and overworked,” she reflects. “So it was important to me to cut off and disconnect, which I think preserves so much of your emotional and mental well-being.”

SHANIA TWAIN





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These days, she's all about achieving balance. Not in a woo-woo, Goop-y sort of way – she's just taking a look at the natural ebbs and flows of life, and figuring out where to put her energy.

"No matter how mad it gets, I'm always gonna look for that retreat of simplicity," she tells me. "I don't need adulation every day of my life. I'm lucky that I do come from a very simple life and I've never let go of it."

She got a taste for the simple life in her hometown of Timmins, Ontario, a mining town 550km north of Toronto. Shania's childhood wasn't an easy one – she has spoken about her adoptive father's violent outbursts, as well as the punishing poverty her family endured. Her mother started taking her to bars to perform when she was just eight years old; she would place her on countertops and fire up the jukebox as a backing track. Eventually, these informal gigs led to paid gigs, and just as things were picking up, Shania's parents died in a car crash.

Orphaned at 22, Shania had to earn money to feed herself and her two younger siblings. She ended up accepting a singing gig at a nearby resort, where she would record demos in her off hours and send them out to music executives. Soon, Mercury Nashville Records noticed, signed her and moved her to Tennessee to embark on a career as a



country music star. But things weren't exactly as Shania expected them to be.

"The country music genre's perception of what was acceptable for women was very offensive to me," she says. Many argue that, even still, country music enforces a ceiling on its female artists – people who work in country radio often discuss an informal but well-known rule that DJs should refrain from playing two female artists back to back. Shania tells me that when she was in Nashville, there were also strict expectations placed on the presentation of

female artists – anything too sexy was verboten.

Though at the time she didn't have much control over the music she recorded, she famously took the creative reins on one of her first videos, for the single *What Made You Say That*. In the beachy clip, Shania lolls around in the sand with her bare midriff exposed. Much to the star's surprise, it caused a controversy in the country music world. "I just thought, well, Dolly Parton's my all-time country music female hero. And she's as original as they come. She's as funny as they come. She's as sexy as they come. There's no limits," she says. "I was a bit disillusioned and thinking that when I got [to Nashville] it would be that way [for me]."

MEN'S SHIRTS, SHORT SKIRTS

SHANIA'S BEST 'FITS



⌚ **THE SATIN SERVE**

Shania loves resurrecting her *Man! I Feel Like a Woman!* ensemble in her live performances.

⌚ **THE KILLER CREAM**

Two gramophones and a figure-skimming gown spelled a great night for Shania at the 1999 Grammys.



⌚ **THE PEPTO PICK-ME-UP**

This little number showed up at the 1999 CMA Awards, where Shania was up for Entertainer of the Year.



⌚ **THE TOUCHDOWN**

Shania pulled out all the stops for her 2003 Super Bowl half-time show – thigh-high boots, fishnets and all.



⌚ **THE WILD THING**

Leopard has been a staple of Shania's wardrobe since the 1997 video for *That Don't Impress Me Much*.



I was totally surprised that I was walking into something that wasn't that way at all."

Still, Shania was resolute. "I wasn't going to let the genre hold me down. Let's make that clear, I was always intending on being as broad and as global as possible."

Before too long, she began a famous partnership – both romantic and musical – with producer and songwriter Robert "Mutt" Lange. It resulted in three certified diamond albums (1995's *The Woman in Me*, 1997's *Come On Over*, and 2002's *Up!*), a marriage, a child and a divorce, following an infamous affair between Mutt and Shania's then-friend and personal assistant, Marie-Anne Thiébaud. (Shania is now married to Thiébaud's ex-husband, Frédéric, who connected with Shania after the affair came out.)

It also marked the beginning of Shania's country-pop era. Though most of her hits are rooted in a country sensibility (listen to the wall of fiddles in the chorus of *Man! I Feel Like a Woman!* or the twangy guitar in *That Don't Impress Me Much*), it was the addictive, boot-stomping infusion of pop into her music that sent her stratospheric. She's strayed even further into pop territory on her two latest albums, *Now* (2017) and this year's *Queen of Me*. Was this an intentional move? Is she shedding her allegiance to country like Taylor Swift or Kacey Musgraves – both of whom owe a great debt to Shania?

No, she tells me. But she does despair about homogenising forces in country music. "I remember when I was growing up, there were many more influences injected into country that I loved," she says. "For example, bluegrass was more injected into country when I was growing up. There would never be the same producers and the same songwriters for 10, 15 different artists." So, true to her own music, Shania looks for that crossover flavour from other artists. "If I wanna have a long listen of the same thing for an hour, I'll put on Pink Floyd."

"I love to share, and open my arms and my heart... I'm still accessible and I'm still engaged in the industry"

It's not just a feature of modern country – the supremacy of streamers means that a lot of artists end up chasing the same, algorithm-friendly sound. It's a different world from the one Shania started out in, but she tells me that young artists today are still dealing with a lot of the same stuff, so she likes to give advice whenever she can. "I've already got a child, I don't need more kids in that sense," she says. "But I love to share, and open my arms and my heart. They grew up to my music yet I'm still accessible and I'm still engaged in the industry. So they know that I'm not out of touch yet."

I've heard Shania call herself an "auntie", in that she adopts a pseudo-maternal stance towards younger artists. She won't tell me what piece of advice she gave Harry Styles after their surprise Coachella performance last year – "I probably wouldn't be a very good aunt if I did that" – but

she says that she always stresses the importance of self-preservation. "[When] you hear too many negative things, it negates all of the positives sometimes," she says. "I have wellness boundaries that I set and I don't cross. It sounds kind of weird, but I read things backwards and I scan through and I look for certain language, and the minute I get a red flag, I'm out."

After more than three decades in the entertainment industry, it seems like Shania has the whole thing down – keep



a careful distance, don't listen to too much feedback, get outside as much as you can. We return again to the idea of balance – I ask her if she feels like she'll ever achieve it, or is that an impossible goal? "I don't know. I think you're just always reprioritising through the course of your life," she says. "I don't think that stops for a woman. I think it's always this thing within yourself of, am I the professional? Am I the parent? You don't want to have to decide one or the other. But I think what you do over periods and phases of your life is you prioritise differently as you go."

She got a lesson in life's vacillations when Lyme disease damaged her vocal chords and left her unable to sing, which forced her into an extended sabbatical. Still, though she's spoken about the fear she felt, she tells me there was a lot to appreciate in that period. "I was loving and indulging in being a mom. I enjoyed walking [my son] to school every day and back, and making the lunches. And I enjoyed my flowers and I enjoyed my horses more. I do embrace the moments when I get the opportunity to take advantage of other things. It's all good. And this is where I am – where do I reprioritise my time and my energy?"

Lately, she's funnelling all her energy into her music and live shows. "I'm on a really big high with [the 25th anniversaries of] these triple-diamond albums. I'm feeling very creative right now." She tells me that she's experiencing people's respect in a whole new way. "I wasn't really experiencing it in its fullest at the time because I was so busy. Now the industry is showing all this respect and it's like, wow, I never even knew you guys cared what I was doing."

So she's riding the wave and setting herself "creative challenges", as she puts it, for her *Queen of Me* tour – which runs until mid-November – and her third Vegas residency next year. She plans to never repeat an outfit on tour – apart from the final number, where she either dons the satin outfit she wore in the *Man! I Feel Like a Woman!* video or the leopard-print cloak she made famous in the video for *That Don't Impress Me Much*. "When I take off the hood, it always gets a big cheer," she says.

But she tells me that, no matter how busy it gets, she'll always make time to ride her horses and she'll always return to her life in the Swiss countryside. It's this contrasting force that's given her a grounded outlook on fame and life. "[I have] nothing left to prove," she says. "I have things to do, not things to worry about."

🎧 LISTEN TO ICONS: SHANIA TWAIN

UP, UP, UP

SHANIA TWAIN'S CV



BORN

Eileen Regina Twain was born in Windsor, Ontario, Canada on 28 August 1965. She eventually changed her name to "Shania" to honour her stepfather's Indigenous heritage (it means "I'm on my way" in the Ojibwe language).

EDUCATION

After moving with her mother to nearby Timmins when she was two, she graduated from Timmins High School in 1983.

FUN FACT

An impressed Sean Penn offered to direct her second-ever music video, *Dance With the One that Brought You*. He also gave her \$100 to ease her financial struggles.

KEY WORK

The Woman in Me (1995)

Shania became a global sensation with her first diamond-certified album, which marked the beginning of her long collaboration with then-partner Mutt Lange.

Come On Over (1997)

The second in Shania's three-album diamond streak includes the mega hits *You're Still the One* and *Man! I Feel Like a Woman!*

Up! (2002)

Famously released in three versions – pop, country or international, each with unique cover art – a 15-year gap followed until 2017's *Now*, her fifth studio album.

Queen of Me (2023)

Shania's sixth album was released earlier this year, featuring stomping lasso-rock single *Giddy Up!*



Above: Shania and Harry Styles perform at the Coachella festival in 2022. Right: Shania's multi-platinum 1997 album, *Come On Over*