



Hot Tracks

JASON ISBELL

I heard a lot of racist comments from people I grew up with," says Alabama native, singer/songwriter/guitarist **Jason Isbell**. "But when I started listening to the music of Otis Redding, Aretha Franklin, and the Staple Singers, it taught me that if there's something wrong with the people making that, then I'd also like that to be wrong with me." Isbell, 38, a former member of the rock band Drive-By Truckers, went solo in 2007. Since then, he has quit drinking, released six albums, won two Grammys, and had a daughter with his wife, the noted musician Amanda Shires, who also plays in his band, the 400 Unit. Here, he talks with **Lisa Robinson** about music, politics, and fame.

LISA ROBINSON: A song on your latest album (*The Nashville Sound*) is titled "White Man's World." How do you feel coming from the state that gave us Jeff Sessions?

JASON ISBELL: I grew up in a place surrounded by white people; there weren't any black people in my high school. I live in Nashville now, which is pretty much the same. But when I got into my teens, music was the thing that kept me from winding up as closed-minded as the people I grew up with.

L.R.: As a songwriter, can you ignore what's going on in our country now?

J.I.: It's heartbreaking—the last time I saw Sharon Jones was in Charlottesville at the Jefferson Theater, and it was a beautiful night.

This administration has emboldened hateful beliefs to come forward because we've rewarded bad behavior. But people are communicating in a way we haven't in years, and calling people out for hateful beliefs.

L.R.: Are you surprised by the attention you've gotten from musicians like Willie Nelson, Bruce Springsteen, and John Prine?

J.I.: The Truckers were very well received critically; people had a lot of respect for that band. But I never expected my work to reach this point. John Prine was always a hero of mine; some of his songs made me realize what a songwriter was. To be able to go swimming at John's house or go to dinner with him and his wife is just incredible. I never thought to dream of that.