

E-Mail Interview with Sister Hazel, October 2018

Interview: Globalcountry.Media Heidi Duss / Questions answered by Ryan Newell



Fotos: Wind Art credit – **Tim Wallace** / Porch photo credit - **Dave Schlenker**

When and how did the journey begin of Sister Hazel making music together?

Sister Hazel formed in 1993 in Gainesville, Florida. Everyone except our drummer, Mark, attended the University of Florida. We were all in different bands at first but then we decided that we wanted to join forces. We bought a van and trailer and started to tour the south eastern part of the United States. We recorded a demo to get shows and sold it out of the back of our van. Our fan base grew to be one of the largest of the regional bands at the time. We managed to convince a local radio station to play one of our songs and it caught the attention of Universal Records. We signed with them in 1996.

Do you think your namesake, the late Sister Hazel Williams, would still be proud?

We actually met with Sister Hazel Williams and asked for her blessing for the namesake. We attended one of her church services and Ken, our lead singer, got up and spoke to the whole congregation. She was impressed and continued to support the band until her passing a few years ago.

Can you tell me more about your latest EP, *Wind*?

Wind is one of four EP's in our "Elements" series. We decided to put more music out more frequently. We are releasing all four over a period of two years. Each EP has a one minute song at the end which is continued on the subsequent EP. When all are released, those songs will be connected to create one song with four movements.

A lot of songs on the new EP's are co-written by a couple of the band members and outside songwriters. How do you pick who to write with in and out of the band?

The songwriting process is always different depending on where we are mentally and geographically. We have spent a lot of time in Nashville over the last decade, so it was very natural for us to tap into the amazing arsenal of songwriters in that town. We co-write with each other on the road. If somebody feels they can contribute and have a passion for a song, any and all are encouraged to help out.

What is your favorite song among all the songs you have recorded and what is the story behind it?

Right now the song that means the most to me is a song called "In Two" on our latest EP, *Wind*. I wrote that song with my friend, Todd Wright, for my wedding in 2015. I had no intention of it going on a record. It was for my wife and the wedding. Todd and I performed the song at the ceremony. The band and I felt that the song was too special to not share it with our fans.

Who inspires you musically?

That list is way too long!! I grew up on classic rock. I'm also from the South so I have an affinity for southern rock. Right now, if I had to choose just one person, I would say I'm in a Tom Petty phase.

What has been your greatest challenge in the music business?

Navigating the intricacies of being in a band. We have accomplished what very few bands have done before us. We kept the band together with all original members for 25 years.

What can your fans expect to see when they see you in concert?

The fans can expect a show that is different than the last show of ours. We change the set list every night. We have people that follow us from town to town so we want to keep it interesting for them as well as for ourselves. We always play a handful of Sister Hazel staples and we try to put in at least two or three songs from our latest release. Our old songs develop new arrangements from time to time to keep things from going on auto pilot.

You appeared at the Grand Ole Opry and the CMA Festival this year how was this for you?

Playing the Opry is a dream come true for all of us in the band. The history and honor never escapes us. We also feel blessed that Nashville has embraced us enough to play the CMA Fest. We have a lot of roots planted in Nashville and it always feels like coming home.

When can fans finally see you in Europe?

We have been talking about touring Europe for years. We have some ideas cooking, Hopefully soon.

What highlights and achievements stand out in your career that you are proud of?

Playing with the Allman Brothers at Red Rocks Amphitheater sticks out as one of our best moments. They are such a big influence on us and to be invited into their camp was an honor. The venue is one of the best in the world and our two night stand with the Allmans will always be a cherished memory.

Any last words for our readers and your fans? How do they connect with you?

Check out our annual cruise, The Rock Boat! therockboat.com Anything Sister Hazel is at Sisterhazel.com and Twitter [Sisterhazelband](https://twitter.com/Sisterhazelband).

