

# CHAPEL HART

Family members crowded the house, various aunts, hundreds of cousins, and music; endless amounts of music. Breaking out in chorus, assembling family choirs and melodies; dreams were spun around the genuine gathering in sweet southern Mississippi. It came as no surprise that, given this background, a few of those kids would set their sights on the stage and would be destined for a career in music.

Chapel Hart is a trio of cousins. Sisters Danica and Devynn Hart, along with 1st cousin Trea Swindle grew up in a small community called Hart's Chapel, Mississippi. When they were looking for the ultimate name for their trio, their manager suggested Chapel Hart. "At first we laughed," says Devynn, "then we realized it was a great idea because the name represents exactly who we are."

If Danica had not lost her job, the trio might not have come together. But as the saying goes, when one door closes, another door opens. "My cousins invited me to New Orleans after I lost my job and so I went. Trea and I got together a list of about 15 songs and we started to busk down on Royal Street. One day a club owner by the name of Tony Seville, came by and said, 'You girls don't need to be here on the street. Come sing in my club'."

The group started out as a duo, playing in New Orleans and drawing from their entire musical background. They took a couple of years to try and acclimate to the New Orleans music scene, but they knew that wasn't what was in their heart to do. When Devynn joined Trea and Danica, the three decided to go back to what they really loved, which was country music. They chose to ignore that they were told more than once that there was no country music coming out of New Orleans.

Helping solidify their decision, the girls were given advice from one of the bands they used to cover on Royal Street, Louisiana's LeRoux. LeRoux told them several things that they deeply resonated with. The girls remember vividly what they said. "They stressed the importance of staying together, talked about the good and bad times, but the most important thing was when they said let the music be the guide and never forget what you do is for the love of the music." Shortly after this encounter with the band, they were then asked to sing harmonies on LeRoux's famous song 'New Orleans Ladies'.

Another eye-opener for the trio was their trip to Innsbruck, Austria, where they headlined the New Orleans Music Festival. "We played under the name of our cover band and we did cover songs, but we also did some of our original music. The people attending the festival loved it. This was an eye-opening experience for us because it was the first time we took our music somewhere other than where we had a fan base," says Danica. "The first day after we played, the line backstage was short to buy our CD. The second day the crowd was lined up around the corner. On the third day, it rained, and we thought no one would come, but people were again

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lined up around the building. They were asking us about certain songs and if they were on the CD and they wanted to know when we were coming back. When you get these markers on the road, you know you are on the right track.”

After Innsbruck, the trio was more determined than ever to play country music, but people still asked why they wanted to go in that direction. The answer was simple: They were raised in Mississippi and listened to local station Kicker 108 all the time. “It was the storytelling in country music, how easy you could put yourself in a country song,” Danica explains. “My dad listened to George Strait and Kenny Rogers. Music was our thing, and it always led back to country music, which shaped us to be who we are today.”

The trio admits they get some strange looks when they show up at the small honky-tonks and bars, but once they hit the stage the ice is broken, and everyone has a good time. They believe that as long as they are being genuine and doing what makes their heart happy and what God put in them to do, people can’t help but connect to that.

In talking about their goals, Danica remembers being a little girl wanting to sing country music, but “I didn’t see anyone who looked like me on the country music awards shows. I hope as we stand on the ACM or CMA stage, girls who want to sing country music will see us and they can see themselves doing what we are doing.”

Rissi Palmer, who was one of the first African American women to chart in country music in 20 years, found the trio on social media and they became acquainted. Trea remembers telling Rissi that one of the funniest things people say to them is “Why did you choose country music?” “You don’t really choose it, it was how we grew up and who we are,” Trea says. “There is a lot to deal with being African American and singing country music, even in 2020. Country music is simply just in our hearts.

Chapel Hart is in the midst of their radio tour for “Jesus & Alcohol,” and are working on finishing their second album following their successful first release, “Out the Mud.” They are writing many songs together and are also working with Nashville writers including Jim McCormick, Tony Haselden, and Derek Norsworthy. The tour began in south Louisiana and will end in Nashville. Those fortunate enough to get to see them live will be treated to an evening of heart and personality where they feel like they are sitting at home in their living room, hanging out with their best friends, and listening to some great country music.

When people hear Chapel Hart, they are hearing real country music with stories that make a genuine connection with people. “It’s real, raw country,” says Trea, explaining, “We play music that is a combination of influences from all of our backgrounds, played from our heart.” With

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diamond focus, undying faith, and sparkling charisma, the sky's the limit for all that Chapel Hart will conquer in the coming months.