

Chris Isaak

Adult Contemporary Artist

Chris Isaak clearly loves the reverb-laden rockabilly and country of Sun Studios. In particular, he transfers the sweeping melancholy of Roy Orbison's classic Monument singles ("Crying," "Oh, Pretty Woman," "In Dreams") to the more stripped-down, rootsy sound of Sun. His stylized take on '50s and '60s rock & roll eventually made him into a star in the early '90s, thanks to the hit single "Wicked Game."

Isaak began performing after he graduated from college, forming the rockabilly band Silvertone. The group, which featured guitarist James Calvin Wilsey, bassist Rowland Salley, and drummer Kenney Dale Johnson, would become the singer/guitarist's permanent supporting band. Isaak released his first album, Silvertone, on Warner Bros. in 1985. It was critically well received, yet it didn't sell. Two years later, he released Chris Isaak, which managed to scrape into the Top 200 album charts. After its release, the singer began an acting career with a bit part in Jonathan Demme's 1988 film Married to the Mob; he would later have parts in Wild at Heart, The Silence of the Lambs, and A Dirty Shame, as well as starring in his own situation comedy series for the Showtime cable network.

Released in 1989, Heart Shaped World initially sold more than Chris Isaak, yet it didn't manage to break big until late 1990, when the single "Wicked Game" was featured in David Lynch's Wild at Heart. Soon, the single became a Top Ten hit; the album also made it into the Top Ten and sold over a million copies. Both 1993's San Francisco Days and 1995's Forever Blue mined essentially the same vein as Heart Shaped World, yet both went gold and spawned a handful of hits. In 1996, Isaak released The Baja Sessions; Speak of the Devil followed two years later. Isaak's busy touring schedule and growing visibility as an actor kept him out of the recording studio until 2002, when he released Always Got Tonight, though in 2004 he did find time to cut his first seasonal album, Chris Isaak Christmas, which featured five new Yuletide tunes along with a batch of holiday favorites. ~ Stephen Thomas Erlewine, All Music Guide

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