

Shania Twain: Sound and Style Groundbreaker

You can easily measure Shania Twain’s career by the numbers. With eighty-five million in album sales, she is country music’s best-selling female artist. But numbers don’t begin to express Twain’s importance.

She achieved her success in the mid-1990s with groundbreaking force, using a distinctive voice, a glamorous style, and most of all, a catchy pop-country sound to draw millions of new fans into country music. Among her admirers are the latest generation of country artists, particularly women, who say she strongly influenced their careers.

“She grew country music around the world,” Carrie Underwood says. “There was nobody else that looked or felt or sounded like her.”

Born Eileen Regina Edwards on August 28, 1965, in Windsor, Ontario, Canada, Twain began her life with hardship and loss. Her father abandoned the family when she was a toddler. Her mother, Sharon, moved to Timmins, Ontario, and remarried, and her stepfather, Jerry Twain, adopted her and her two sisters. The couple constantly struggled with poverty.

At age three, Twain was singing along to country songs with a voice that showed unusual ability. She played the guitar by age eight, wrote her own songs by age ten, and helped support her family by singing in clubs. At age eighteen, she moved to Toronto, Ontario, to pursue a singing career. Four years later, her parents were killed in a car accident, so Twain moved back to Timmins to care for her younger siblings.

She continued to work on her own music, and she finally caught the attention of a Nashville record company, which released her first album in 1993. Twain followed advice to change her first name to “Shania” (sha-NY-ah), inspired by her late stepfather’s native North American roots.

The album contained only one self-written song and was considered unsuccessful, but her voice drew the interest of Robert



John “Mutt” Lange, a producer who worked with rock bands. The two joined forces and co-wrote ten of the twelve tracks for Twain’s next album, *The Woman in Me*, and by its release in 1995, they were married.

The album, which includes rock, as well as pop sounds, quickly became a sensation, selling more than twelve million copies. Lange then produced and helped Twain write her third album, *Come on Over*, which became country’s all-time best-seller with a staggering forty million copies sold. The couple co-wrote her fourth album, *Up!*, in 2002, which sold an impressive twenty million copies. Twain also headlined two sold-out world tours, filmed numerous trendsetting music videos, and earned Grammy, CMA, and ACM awards.

In 2004, Twain moved to Switzerland with Lange and their son. They divorced in 2010, and Twain began performing again. She released a new album, *Now*, with all self-written songs, in 2017.

“Songwriting is my favorite part of what I do,” Twain says. “I like to give every song its own personality and attitude and to sing each one in its own style.”

Sources: *Billboard*, *Biography.com*, *CMT.com*, *From This Moment On* by Shania Twain, *MusicWorld*, *Rolling Stone*, *Shania Twain: The Biography* by Robin Eggar

LISTEN:

“Any Man of Mine”
“Forever and for Always”
“From This Moment On”
“Honey, I’m Home”
“That Don’t Impress Me Much”
“You’re Still the One”
“You Win My Love”

READ:

From This Moment On by Shania Twain (Atria Books, 2011): Twain tells her own story about her difficult early years and her rise to fame, covering both career highlights and personal drama.

Shania Twain: The Biography by Robin Eggar (Gallery, 2005): Published before Twain’s divorce, this book details her childhood traumas and offers a behind-the-scenes look at her collaboration with Mutt Lange.