

= Uncle Tupelo =

Uncle Tupelo was an alternative country music group from Belleville , Illinois , active between 1987 and 1994 . Jay Farrar , Jeff Tweedy , and Mike Heidorn formed the band after the lead singer of their previous band , The Primitives , left to attend college . The trio recorded three albums for Rockville Records , before signing with Sire Records and expanding to a five @-@ piece . Shortly after the release of the band 's major label debut album Anodyne , Farrar announced his decision to leave the band due to a soured relationship with his co @-@ songwriter Tweedy . Uncle Tupelo split on May 1 , 1994 , after completing a farewell tour . Following the breakup , Farrar formed Son Volt with Heidorn , while the remaining members continued as Wilco .

Although Uncle Tupelo broke up before it achieved commercial success , the band is renowned for its impact on the alternative country music scene . The group 's first album , No Depression , became a byword for the genre and was widely influential . Uncle Tupelo 's sound was unlike popular country music of the time , drawing inspiration from styles as diverse as the hardcore punk of The Minutemen and the country instrumentation and harmony of the Carter Family and Hank Williams . Farrar and Tweedy 's lyrics frequently referred to Middle America and the working class of Belleville .

= = History = =

= = = The Plebes and The Primitives = = =

Jay Farrar , along with his brothers Wade and Dade , played in an early 1980s garage band named The Plebes . Hailing from Belleville , Illinois , The Plebes sought to enter a battle @-@ of @-@ the @-@ bands competition but needed another high school student as a member to perform . They invited Jeff Tweedy , a high school friend of Jay Farrar , to join the band and play with them for the show . Despite a lack of skill with his instrument , Tweedy played an important role in the band by booking early gigs . While The Plebes had been playing music in a rockabilly style , Tweedy wanted to play punk rock like the music that he originally heard the group perform . This caused tensions between Tweedy and Dade Farrar , who left the band two months after Tweedy joined .

Before leaving the band in 1984 , Dade Farrar introduced its members to Mike Heidorn , the younger brother of his girlfriend ; Heidorn then joined the group as their drummer . The Plebes then decided to change its name to The Primitives , a reference to a 1965 song by psychedelic rock group The Groupies . Due to the unpopularity of punk rock in the St. Louis area , The Primitives began to play blues @-@ oriented garage rock at fast tempos . They performed regularly at a wedding hall in Millstadt , Illinois , where Tweedy 's mother Jo Ann would collect the cover fee . They also performed regularly at B St Bar in Belleville with bands such as The Newsboys ( later Sammy and the Snowmonkeys ) , Charlie Langrehr , and The Symptoms . Wade Farrar was the lead singer of the band , but his commitment to Southern Illinois University and an attempted enlistment in the United States Army meant he was only able to dedicate a small amount of time to the group . Additionally , Heidorn broke his collarbone during a concert in 1986 , which caused the band to go on hiatus . Jay Farrar and Tweedy continued to write songs and perform at Heidorn 's house while he recovered , and by 1987 they had restarted the group . The Primitives temporarily added Tony Mayr as a bassist so that Tweedy could play guitar , but a month later the band decided to keep Tweedy on bass and remain a three @-@ piece . To avoid confusion with a successful British band also named The Primitives , they decided to change their name once again , to Uncle Tupelo . Although they performed only 1960s cover songs as The Primitives , the trio decided to take a new approach and write their own music under their new name .

= = = Early career = = =

The Primitives renamed itself Uncle Tupelo after a character in a cartoon drawn by Chuck Wagner ,

a friend of the band 's members . The name was created by combining two randomly chosen words from the dictionary ; inspired by the name , Wagner drew a picture of an old , fat Elvis . The trio recorded a four @-@ song demo tape , which won them supporting roles at the concerts of artists such as Johnny Thunders and Warren Zevon . Tweedy met Tony Margherita while moonlighting as a record clerk in St. Louis . After attending a pair of the band 's concerts , Margherita offered to become its manager . Uncle Tupelo began to play regular shows at Cicero 's Basement ? a bar close to the campus of Washington University . Bands playing in a similar style , including Brian Henneman 's Chicken Truck , often played at the venue , which by late 1988 was considered to have been the origin of a new music scene . The band temporarily expanded to a four @-@ piece with the addition of the guitarist Alex Mutrux , but soon reverted to a trio .

Uncle Tupelo recorded its first tracks in the attic studio of future Chicago punk producer Matt Allison in Champaign , Illinois . The demo Not Forever , Just for Now includes the songs " I Got Drunk " and " Screen Door " , as well as early versions of several songs that would appear on their first studio album . The CMJ New Music Report gave the tape a rave review , and called Uncle Tupelo the best unsigned band of the year . The accolade attracted the attention of independent labels , and the band decided to sign with Jay Fialkov and Debbie Southwood @-@ Smith of Giant Records ( who offered to book them at CBGB in New York City ) . Explaining the decision , the band said that " [ our ] original goals don 't get distorted with an independent label . "

= = = Recordings on Rockville Records = = =

Shortly after Uncle Tupelo 's signing , Giant Records changed its name to Rockville Records . The band 's first album for Rockville No Depression , was recorded over ten days in January 1990 , at Fort Apache South recording studio in Boston , Massachusetts . The album 's thematic structure revolved around their lives as adolescents in Belleville ; examples are songs about wanting to avoid factory work and songs about fearing a potential Persian Gulf War military draft . Impressed by their previous work on Dinosaur Jr . ' s Bug , the band wanted Paul Kolderie and Sean Slade to produce the album . Slade let Farrar play on the same 1961 Gibson Les Paul SG Junior that J. Mascis originally played on Bug . The album was released on June 21 , 1990 , and the band celebrated by playing at Cicero 's for two nights .

In between tours , Farrar , Tweedy and Heidorn formed a country cover band named Coffee Creek , along with Brian Henneman ( later a member of The Bottle Rockets ) . Henneman impressed Uncle Tupelo , and he was invited to be a guitar technician and occasional multi @-@ instrumentalist for the band . While Farrar and Heidorn would avoid drinking too much after shows , Tweedy would continue drinking throughout the night . Although Tweedy stopped after he began dating Sue Miller in 1991 , a significant communication gap had already been opened between Tweedy and Farrar .

By March 1991 , No Depression had sold an estimated 15 @,@ 000 copies , and was featured in a Rolling Stone article about rising stars . However , Rockville Records refused to pay the band any royalties for the album , a theme that would continue for the remainder of the band 's contract . Over seventeen days the band recorded a second album at Long View Farm in rural North Brookfield , Massachusetts . Still Feel Gone , with a more layered sound , was also produced by Kolderie and Slade , with contributions by Slade , Henneman , Rich Gilbert , Chris Bess of Enormous Richard , and Gary Louris of The Jayhawks . The band was disappointed with the production of the album and decided to discontinue working with Kolderie and Slade . Soon afterward , Uncle Tupelo recorded " Shaking Hands ( Soldier 's Joy ) " on Michelle Shocked 's album Arkansas Traveler and joined her on the accompanying tour with Taj Mahal and The Band . However , the tour only lasted for a few shows because of managerial problems between Shocked and The Band .

Alternative rock had broken into the mainstream by 1992 , and an album released in that style was expected to earn the group a major @-@ label record deal . However , Uncle Tupelo didn 't want to follow in the footsteps of groups such as Nirvana , and decided to play country and folk songs " as a big ' fuck you ' to the rock scene " . Peter Buck , guitarist for R.E.M. , saw the trio perform at the 40 Watt Club in Athens , Georgia and sought them out after the show . Buck was impressed with a version of " Atomic Power " that the band played , and offered his services for their next album .

Over a span of five days , Buck produced the group 's next album , March 16 ? 20 , 1992 . Buck allowed them to stay in his house during the sessions , and charged no money for his services . Brian Henneman 's role was increased for this album , and he taught himself how to play mandolin and bouzouki . Despite turning away from the style of popular alternative rock , major labels began to show significant interest in Uncle Tupelo after March 16 ? 20 , 1992 was released . The album sold more than their two previous recordings combined , although Rockville was displeased that it did not conform to the style of popular alternative rock .

= = = Major label contract = = =

In 1992 , Joe McEwen of Sire Records began to pursue the band . McEwen , who brought notable acts such as Dinosaur Jr and Shawn Colvin to Sire , had been interested in them since hearing the Not Forever , Just for Now demo tape . At the urging of Gary Louris , McEwen offered Uncle Tupelo a contract . Band manager Tony Margherita invoked the \$ 50 @, @ 000 escape clause he had put in their Rockville contract , freeing the band to sign a seven @-@ year deal with Sire . The deal required two albums , and specified a budget of \$ 150 @, @ 000 for their first .

Around the time of the recording of March 16 ? 20 , 1992 , Mike Heidorn had secured a steady job at a Belleville newspaper company and was dating a woman who had two children from a previous marriage . Uncle Tupelo had planned a tour of Europe , but Heidorn wanted to stay in Belleville with his girlfriend , whom he married in August 1992 .

The band held auditions prior to the promotional tour for March 16 ? 20 , 1992 , and two candidates stood out : Bill Belzer and Ken Coomer . Although singers Jay Farrar and Jeff Tweedy agreed that Coomer was the better drummer , they were intimidated by his six @-@ foot @-@ four stature and long dreadlocks . The band selected Belzer as Heidorn 's replacement , but he only stayed with the band for six months . Tweedy explained Belzer 's departure :

We had Belzer in the band for six months . I want to believe it was purely musical , and I honestly believe that it wasn 't working musically . I also believe that we weren 't emotionally mature enough to be close friends with a gay person at that point in our lives ... And Bill was and is a very proud and righteous gay person , very open about his homosexuality .

After touring Europe opening for Sugar , the band replaced Belzer with Coomer . The band also experimented with new members : John Stirratt replaced Brian Henneman ( who left to form The Bottle Rockets ) while Max Johnston , the brother of Michelle Shocked , joined as a live mandolin and violin performer . Stirratt became a full @-@ time bassist , allowing Tweedy to perform more songs with the guitar .

Now a five @-@ piece , Uncle Tupelo recorded their major label debut at Cedar Creek studio in Austin , Texas in early 1993 . Anodyne consisted of live @-@ in @-@ the @-@ studio recordings and included a duet with Farrar and Doug Sahm of the Sir Douglas Quintet . The album sold 150 @, @ 000 copies , and was their only entry on the Billboard Heatseekers chart . The group toured until the end of the year , finishing with a sold out concert at Tramps in New York City . Because of their concert draw , major executives at Sire began to see the band as a potential hit .

In 1993 , the band contributed a cover of Creedence Clearwater Revival 's track " Effigy " to the AIDS @-@ Benefit album No Alternative produced by the Red Hot Organization .

= = = Breakup = = =

With the addition of Stirratt , Coomer , and Johnston just prior to the recording of Anodyne , Farrar and Tweedy 's relationship became more tumultuous , leading to verbal altercations after concerts . In one account , Tweedy recalled :

Around this time , I would say something into a microphone onstage , and afterward [ Farrar would ] pull me aside and say , " Don 't you ever fucking talk into that microphone again . " He would misconstrue me talking into the microphone as more evidence of my out @-@ of @-@ control , rampant ego , more evidence of me feeling like I didn 't have to be so fucking afraid anymore .

Tweedy felt the new members gave him a new opportunity to contribute to the band , but Farrar felt

disdain for Tweedy 's new carefree attitude . Years later , Farrar would claim that he had been tempted to quit the band after seeing Tweedy stroking the hair of Farrar 's girlfriend , an act which he believed to have been a proposition . In January 1994 , Farrar called manager Tony Margherita to inform him of his decision to leave the band . Farrar told Margherita that he was no longer having fun , and didn 't want to work with Tweedy anymore . Soon after the breakup , Farrar explained his departure : " It just seemed like it reached a point where Jeff and I really weren 't compatible . It had ceased to be a symbiotic songwriting relationship , probably after the first record . "

Tweedy was enraged that he heard the news secondhand from Margherita , since Farrar decided not to tell him in person . The following day , the two singers engaged in a verbal confrontation . As a favor to Margherita ? who had spent a substantial amount of money to keep the band running ? Farrar agreed to a final tour with Uncle Tupelo in North America . Tweedy and Farrar again engaged in a shouting match two weeks into the tour , due to Farrar 's refusal to sing harmony on any of Tweedy 's songs . The band made its first appearance on national television during the tour when they were featured on Late Night with Conan O 'Brien . Sire had requested that the band perform " The Long Cut " on the show , which further irked Farrar since the song was written and sung by Tweedy . Uncle Tupelo 's last concert was May 1 , 1994 , at Mississippi Nights in St. Louis , Missouri . Tweedy and Farrar each performed nine songs during the concert , and Mike Heidorn performed as drummer during the encore .

= = = Post @-@ breakup = = =

Following Uncle Tupelo 's final tour , Tweedy encouraged his bandmates to join him in a new group , while Farrar searched for members for a band of his own . Tweedy was able to retain the rest of the Uncle Tupelo lineup , and created Wilco . Wilco began rehearsing a few days after the final Uncle Tupelo concert , and by August 1994 they were in the recording studio for their first album , A.M .. Farrar asked Jim Boquist to join his new band , Son Volt ; Boquist was a multi @-@ instrumentalist who had performed with Joe Henry as the opening act on Uncle Tupelo 's last tour . Boquist also recruited his brother Dave , and Farrar convinced Mike Heidorn to leave Belleville to join the group . Farrar 's new four @-@ piece began recording their debut album Trace in November 1994 .

Wilco signed to Reprise Records while Son Volt signed with Warner Bros. Records . Son Volt had an early college rock hit with " Drown " from the album Trace , but Wilco maintained a more commercially successful career in the years to follow . Regarding the possibility of a reunion , Mike Heidorn reported in a PopMatters interview that " nothing 's ever for sure , but I would have to say , ' No such thing ' " . Farrar said that he does not want the band to get back together , while Tweedy said that he believes that a reunion would not be productive musically .

Farrar and Tweedy sued Rockville Records and Dutch East India Trading CEO Barry Tenenbaum in 2000 over royalties that the label allegedly owed them , winning reparations from Tenenbaum and the joint rights to Uncle Tupelo 's first three albums . After securing the rights , the band released a compilation entitled 89 / 93 : An Anthology . In 2003 , Uncle Tupelo re @-@ issued their first three albums , which before the lawsuit had cumulatively sold over 200 @,@ 000 copies .

= = Influences = =

As The Primitives , Tweedy and Farrar were highly influenced by punk bands such as The Ramones and The Sex Pistols . However , they began to listen to country music because punk rock was not well received in the Belleville and St. Louis music scenes . While they originally were introduced to country by their parents , it wasn 't until this time that they began to listen to it for leisure . Farrar typically wrote songs about Middle America , while Tweedy wrote about more mainstream topics such as relationships . Farrar took influence from authors such as Kurt Vonnegut and Jack Kerouac , whom he read while working at his mother 's bookstore . As the lead singer of Uncle Tupelo , Farrar 's lyrics would be front @-@ and @-@ center during performances , but the band 's musical style was mostly driven by Tweedy and Heidorn ( seen in the music 's Minutemen

@-@ influenced start @-@ stop arrangement ) . Jeff Tweedy said in an interview with the St. Louis Post @-@ Dispatch :

We probably have more influences than we know what to do with . We have two main styles that have been influences . For instance , we like Black Flag as much as early Bob Dylan and Dinosaur Jr. as much as Hank Williams ... To us , hard @-@ core punk is also folk music . We draw a close parallel between the two . We 'll play both in the same set if we get a chance . We don 't have any biases as far as music is concerned .

Tweedy in particular was inspired by the Minutemen , and wrote a song about D. Boon following Boon 's death in a van accident . The band has released songs originally performed by Creedence Clearwater Revival , The Carter Family , Lead Belly , Gram Parsons , The Soft Boys , The Louvin Brothers , Texas Tornados , and The Stooges . Releasing March 16 ? 20 , 1992 when alternative music was breaking through was a move inspired by Neil Young 's decision to release the challenging albums On the Beach and Tonight 's the Night immediately after the commercially successful Harvest . Critic Michael Corcoran likened the band 's musical style to " Bob Mould fronting Soul Asylum on a speeded @-@ up version of a Gram Parsons song . "

= = Legacy = =

Uncle Tupelo is credited as one of the founders of the alternative country genre , a blend of alternative rock and traditional country music . While the genre eventually became associated with solo artists such as Gram Parsons and Lyle Lovett , Uncle Tupelo is considered the first alternative country band . Some media outlets like the BBC have even suggested that they were the genre 's sole creator . However , Tweedy and Heidorn dispute this claim , and Farrar says that there is no difference between alternative country and other genres such as roots rock . Heidorn commented in a Country Standard Time interview :

It 's strange to hear Uncle Tupelo mentioned because what we were doing was in such a long line of musical history . People are wrong in starting with us and saying we started anything because we were just picking up the ball , starting with Woody Guthrie and on to the early ' 60s and the Flying Burrito Brothers that we were influenced by . We didn 't start a genre . We contributed to a long line of fairly good music . That 's the way we looked at it at the time ? doing what was right for the song .

The band 's first three albums influenced contemporary roots rock artists such as Richmond Fontaine and Whiskeytown . Uncle Tupelo 's usage of distorted guitars to play a style of music that was known for its earnestness became a lasting trend in 1990s modern rock . Jason Ankeny wrote in Allmusic that :

With the release of their 1990 debut LP , No Depression , the Belleville , IL , trio Uncle Tupelo launched more than simply their own career ? by fusing the simplicity and honesty of country music with the bracing fury of punk , they kick @-@ started a revolution which reverberated throughout the American underground .

Their 1990 album No Depression lent its name to an influential alternative country periodical . Due to the influence of the album and periodical , the term " No Depression " became a byword for alternative country ? particularly for bands with punk rock influence . The alternative country movement played an important role in the success of future traditionalist country acts such as Robbie Fulks and Shelby Lynne .

= = Discography = =

= = Studio albums = =

= = Compilations = =

=== Demo tapes ===

All demo tapes are self @-@ released on cassette .

=== Singles ===

=== Contributions ===

Uncle Tupelo also recorded a one @-@ hour radio special that was released by Legacy Records in 2003 . Legacy only distributed the CD , entitled The Long Cut : A One Hour Radio Special , to non @-@ commercial radio stations as a way to promote the re @-@ issues of the band 's studio albums . The special is hosted by Lauren Frey and features interviews by Farrar , Tweedy , and Heidorn .