

Pitching Ace Adam Wainwright Takes The Mound At The Grand Ole Opry Ahead of Album Release

BY RYAN BORBA



HEY Y'ALL: Adam Wainwright, part of two World Series-winning St. Louis Cardinals squads, released his debut country album on April 5.

Adam Wainwright is serious about his budding country music career but, after competing at the highest level of baseball for 18 seasons, he's going to enjoy the ride.

"The last three years that I played was the first time in all my years playing baseball that I took time to enjoy and to take in the awesomeness of being a Major League Baseball player," said Adam Wainwright, a 200-game winning starting pitcher who spent his entire MLB career with the St. Louis Cardinals before retiring at the end of the 2023 season. He's talking just weeks before the release of his first country music album, *Hey Y'all*, and just weeks after gracing the stage of the Grand Ole Opry as a musical guest.

"I started going on these 'old man walks,'" he said. "I'd go out the day after I pitched and I would go explore these great venues that we get to play in — I'd walk around Dodger Stadium, walk around Wrigley Field and walk around Busch Stadium. Not just the concourses, but up in the press boxes and getting behind-the-scenes tours and getting up in the scoreboards and sitting out in the stands and experiencing the whole thing."

Wainwright, enjoying his first offseason not having to get MLB game ready, may now be able to skip the gym after taking one of his five children to a school recital or their own sporting events, but he's still keeping busy. He recently signed with Fox Sports and MLB Network as an analyst for the 2024 season, where he will offer color commentary for a full slate of regular season and postseason MLB games, including the MLB World Tour: London matchup at London Stadium in June.

An inability to sit still for prolonged periods played a hand in developing a new hobby and professional pursuit. As a rock and country fan growing up in the 1990s, Wainwright's wife, high school sweetheart Jenny, got him a guitar in 2001, which he learned to play and sing along with while in the minor leagues.

"I tore my Achilles in 2015, and I had a little bit more time," he said, relegated to a walking boot or scooter while recovering from the injury. "I started playing a little bit more music and my wife's like, this could be a good outlet for you. And so she's right, again."

Wainwright met Grammy-winning musician and songwriter Gary Baker in spring training, where the two began working on music together.

"It was originally just to have some songs to play for the boys, but Gary really encouraged me," Wainwright said. "He said, 'These songs that we've got here are a little bit better than I thought they were going to be. You need to think about making an album and sharing this with the world.' And that's what we've done, man. That started back in 2019-20 and we've been working on it ever since. It's been a long process, but it's been a wonderful one."

Feeling like a kid in a candy store, Wainwright got to take in the history and talented musicians at Muscle Shoals Sound Studio in Alabama to record his album, where he got to pick the brains of musicians behind some of his favorite songs and records. "There's no guarantee that I'll get to make 18 years' worth of records, so I want to make sure I'm enjoying every single second of it," he said.

The positive reception from the music community led to the opportunity to play the Grand Ole Opry, hallowed ground for the

country music fan who's made friends of artists including Luke Bryan and Cole Swindell.

On April 6, Wainwright was to open for Zac Brown Band at Chaifetz Arena in St. Louis, where he can expect a legion of Cardinals fans wanting to cheer on their beloved "Waino."

"I knew they would support me but I did not know that they would support me like they did when I was at the Opry in Nashville," said Wainwright, who was on the mound at Busch Stadium to record the final out of Game 5 of the 2006 World Series, clinching the trophy for the Redbirds. "I felt like I was playing at Busch Stadium almost, there were so many Cardinals fans there, so many Wainwright jerseys."

"We had a meet and greet afterwards with like 226 people there with all Cardinals jerseys on," he said. "It's been like that everywhere I've gone so far, and I can't wait to play in St. Louis in front of our hometown crowd there. Right after that, I'm going to Cape Girardeau for the Eclipse Show down there at the Rock and Roll Drive-in (on April 8). I'm very excited about all of it."

He's also eager to spend more time at home, stressing that his wife and kids come before any musical endeavors, after spending so much time away over the course of his baseball career.

"My wife says I got rid of one job and got three jobs, so I'll definitely be busy," he said, stressing that being a good husband is priority No. 1. "But I've gotten to experience more Little League games in the last two months than I have in my 18 years combined, you know? I'm getting to watch now and to help coach. I'm having so much fun doing that." **■**