

(6.21.17) <http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/country/7841045/brett-young-interview-baseball-career-beginnings>

Emerging Country Star Brett Young Talks Career Beginnings & What's Next



If you were in attendance at the Carolina Country Music Festival in Myrtle Beach earlier this month, you know that Brett Young's appearance on Thursday night (June 8) was one of the highlights of the opening evening. It was a little different from last year, when the singer played the festival -- before his singles "Sleep Without You" or "In Case You Didn't Know" hit the charts.

"When they put us on last year, it really didn't make a lot of sense," the singer said of his 2016 debut on the CCMF stage. "We didn't have music out yet. We played at noon on the last day of the Festival last year. It was 100 degrees outside, and we didn't have much of a crowd. Thankfully, it was a different experience this year. We had a blast."

But, the distinction of two back-to-back hits at radio definitely helps one grow a crowd, and the fact that the audiences at his shows can sing his lyrics back to him is not lost on the singer. "That's one of the coolest experiences for an artist, particularly a new artist -- to watch that transition and to watch it kind of build with the live show," he reveals to Billboard. "It's always fun performing for an audience, but when they are singing your song back to you, there's nothing like it. I've been trying to figure out if it's more flattering as an artist or as a songwriter. As an artist, you definitely want that energy when you're on stage, but as a songwriter, it's really flattering to know that many people know the words to your song -- your words."

Young admits that his country roots run deep, although that made him stand out during his growing-up years in Anaheim. "Orange County will always have a special place in my heart -- I've always been a beach bum," the

singer-songwriter relates. "It was a strange time, because when I was growing up, country music wasn't really that big there. Of course, it's huge now. There was one country station that we could get in my hometown, and all my friends were listening to punk rock, like Blink-182 and the Offspring. Finding Tim McGraw and 'Don't Take the Girl' made me the weirdo growing up, but I wouldn't trade it for the world.

Young's self-titled Big Machine debut album has been praised by critics for its impressive wordplay. One such cut is the up-tempo "Left Side Of Leavin'," of which he says, "I had this idea for a song called 'Front Side of Freedom.' The concept was the same as it turned out to be -- coming out of a relationship, there's always one person who is heartbroken, and one who is ready to get on with their lives. I pitched the title, and they said, 'I love that,' and then Jimmy [Robbins] said 'We can do 'Front Side of Freedom, Left Side of Leavin.' We just decided the song was going to be a play on words, and it all fell out pretty fast."

Young will get many chances to play that song -- and others -- during his role as opener of the Lady Antebellum world tour this year. He says he thinks it's going to be a year to remember. "Lady Antebellum fans have been so great, and the first few weeks have been a ball, getting to get out and open for them. We're getting to go across the pond in October, and that will be my first time over there. I can't wait to see Scotland. They have been so good to me. They are such great people and performers, and I feel so lucky to be out on this one."

When asked what the highlights of his career success has been so far, he's quick to answer, "There are so many amazing things that have happened over the last eighteen months, it's hard to pick one." But he does allow that getting to cross names off his "bucket list of venues" has been pretty huge for him.

"We did about ten or twelve shows with Luke Bryan this year, and the second week with him, we got to play Madison Square Garden," he recalls. "That was absolutely incredible, and I wondered if I would be able to top that one. My number one place on the list was the Hollywood Bowl. It's iconic, and I grew up there. We got to play that the second week with Lady Antebellum, and it was everything I thought it would be. That's been the coolest thing for me -- getting to walk out in a hometown show, and there was such a full house."

Seeing the same venue he has sat in so many times as fan takes on new meaning as an artist. "It is so beautiful as a fan, looking at the backdrop of the Hollywood Bowl. But, it's equally if not more beautiful from that stage, looking at that hill, it was very cool."

In addition to being a singer and songwriter, Young is also something of a jock, having played baseball in college. His first year was spent far away from his native California, in the rustic beauty of Ole Miss. Though he only spent a year there, it was one he has a lot of fond memories of -- "Oxford is one of the coolest places, so to get to spend my freshman year in the Grove, getting that Ole Miss Rebel experience was really cool" -- and says he now regrets being a one-and-done: One of the things I wish I had done differently was leaving after my first year because I missed home. I missed the beach and Orange County. I wonder sometimes how life would have been if I had finished out my college career there."

Young chose music over pursuing a professional sports career, though earlier this year -- he did get to combine the two -- performing "The Star Spangled Banner" on opening day for the hometown Dodgers. It was his second time to perform it. "They ran me out in the middle of the season last year, and let me do it," he explains. "I was nervous and it probably wasn't the best showing. But, this year, they brought me back on opening day. and I got to meet Tommy Lasorda and Sandy Koufax. The coolest thing about it all was my dad has been a die-hard Dodgers fan since he was nine years old, and he had never been to opening day before. He had his feet up on the backstop watching his son sing the National Anthem. It was a special day all around."

Young says he take a lot of pride in his career so far, and says that he hopes he can be someone that younger fans can point to as an example of how to conduct yourself on stage. "I think that there's a place for everything, and as an artist, you are given a platform that is bigger than just the stage," he offers. "It's always been important to me that if there's a mom who has a teenage daughter, that she feels just as comfortable bringing her as she does going to the show herself. I really don't see a reason why we have to cross lines to make that a difficult decision for people like that. I think that any topic can be touched on tastefully, and I feel that responsibility to keep things as PG as possible. It's music. It's meant to be shared with everybody."