

Music Review: Jason Aldean Rocks Hard On New CD

Music Review: Jason Aldean Rocks Hard As Usual On Latest CD, But Best Songs Are Reflective



Jason Aldean, "Wide Open" (Broken Bow)

Country music openly parades its hard-rock influences these days, and no one flaunts that aggressive edge more than Jason Aldean. The grunge-metal stomp Aldean puts into his songs has made him one of Nashville's few big-selling acts on an independent record label.

The title of his third album, "Wide Open," suggests he's not about to throttle his rock edge. The songs "Crazy Town" and the title cut rock like Guns N' Roses or Motley Crue, but with a fiddle and a swampy beat. Aldean's big, dramatic voice sounds best with a fast-thumping

ing tune pushing him into overdrive.

But, surprisingly, the best songs on "Wide Open" find Aldean taking time to reflect. He's not the most nuanced of ballad singers, but as with many rockers who soar through a power ballad, there's a sense of drama and dynamics in how Aldean sings the tender emotions expressed in "Don't Give Up On Me" and "Fast."

Aldean occasionally slips into modern-country cliches, as in the stereotypical redneck traits listed in "She's Country," which wastes a solid, countrified AC/DC arrangement on predictable lyrics. Aldean is right to add crunching chords to country; he just needs to stay as ahead of the curve in his lyrics as he does in his rocking arrangements.

CHECK THIS OUT: At his best, Aldean captures that hyper way a rural southerner can talk as fast as any northern counterpart when expressing emotions within a climactic story, which is why "On My Highway" features one of his most expressive vocal performances.

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COUNTRY

(Broken Bow Records)

Jason Aldean made an unlikely splash with his first two albums, selling more than 2 million and charting five hits without much of an image or a defined sound.

But Aldean appealed to fans for that exact reason. He allows good songs to sell themselves and pours his soul into the vocal.

Aldean's latest album, "Wide Open," improves the Georgia native's sound with a spate of better tunes sung by an artist who has found his musical voice.

Aldean doesn't have the strongest or most recognizable pipes in the industry. Yet his voice is familiar, emotional and honest.

On heartbreak songs such as "The Truth" and "Don't Give Up on Me," Aldean conveys the sadness of the lyrics with both melancholy and whimsy, as if he's contrite about the things he's done wrong but not so contrite that he didn't enjoy himself.

Aldean refines his country/rock image with "Crazy Town" and the first single, "She's Country," and he carries the pleasant melody in the album's gem and probable future smash single "Big Green Tractor."

Aldean lets rock guitars tell his stories and doesn't often employ a fiddle or steel guitar.

"Wide Open" is 11 tracks of honest music by an Everyman artist with an ability to make a good song a great song.
— Ben Scott