

Review: Aldean Anchors Adventurous Collection

THE BILLBOARD ALBUMS REVIEWS

JASON ALDEAN

Wide Open

Producer: Michael Knox
Broken Bow Records

Release Date: April 7

Combining the soul of a country boy with a rocker's edgy intensity, Jason Aldean burst through as one of the country format's most successful new artists with such hits as "Why," "Amarillo Sky" and "Johnny Cash." On his third album, he continues to make the kind of ramped-up music that brought him to the party, as evidenced by the fast-climbing first single "She's Country." "Crazy Town" is the Macon, Ga., native's ode to Nashville. "This I Gotta See," which teems with anticipation, boasts a sensuous, descriptive lyric about the woman waiting at home. Among the collection's best tracks are introspective numbers like "Fast," about a country boy leaving rural life behind, and "On My Highway," a potent song that talks of surviving life's up and down and living every moment on your own terms. Aldean's voice has a warmth and soulfulness that is particularly effective on confessional ballads like "Don't Give Up on Me."—DEP



California-based Broken Bow Records arguably hasn't yet done much for the Nashville community, but *Wide Open*, from its flagship artist Jason Aldean, scored impressive first week sales (109k) and is clearly boosting confidence in country's fan connection. Radio is on board, too. *Music Row* named the Macon, Georgia native its Artist of the Year (Mid-Size Label) for 2007 and 2008, based upon spins from the publication's 110 Country Breakout chart reporters.

Aldean's new set is loaded with smart lyrics swimming in a sea of rocking, rhythmic articulations. Title track "Wide Open" sets the stage with crunchy guitars, cutting like a special forces team equipped with platinum-tipped jack hammers breaking into a granite encased vault full of gold. The story follows a young waitress—*slinging eggs and bacon with a college education*—who chooses to believe in herself, and drive full bore into a world she barely understands. It's a one act opera of hope from writers Neil Thrasher, Wendell Mobley and Jim Collins.

Thankfully Aldean's stretchy baritone anchors and welds the "country" into this adventurous collection. His roots-based delivery remains centered whether singing about a man's shortcoming, farm life, an ode to Nashville, a woman's needs or life issues we all face. The fiddle walks around the tracks with heightened sensibilities (uncredited) and listeners will enjoy well placed keyboard, pedal steel and banjo cameos. But make no mistake, this stew is a six-string tour de force. Unlike some of today's artists, carefully controlling their sound, playing by the rules—Aldean eschews safe to deliver a sonic sandwich that doesn't disappoint. Producer Michael Knox has ripped it up on this third-times-a-charm outing, boldly presenting a more mature artist. Aldean's ongoing challenge, which he has yet to master, will be to translate his evolving artistry to live performances as he endeavors to move his career from opening act to headliner status.

This life's full of choices... says the singer on "Keep The Girl" as the listener jumps inside the mind of a lovelorn man who knows that, *like a sword with a double edged blade* whatever he chooses will *cut either way* (Aldean, Thrasher, Mobley).

Luckily, the decision for fans (Aldean's Army) is way easy—get this disc and crank the volume *Wide Open*.