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## **WIDE OPEN**

*Jason Aldean*

The anthemic title track of Jason Aldean's third album makes no secret as to where his loyalties lie — gravel roads, rusty old Fords, a waitress slinging bacon and eggs in a diner. Yet listen past these video ready-mades and you'll find a protagonist with more depth than the two-dimensional cutouts that dominate today's country airwaves. Not only does Aldean's heroine have a college degree — when she finally does throw down her apron, she isn't about to accept life on anyone's terms but her own.

In "This I Gotta See," the supple-voiced Georgia native muses evocatively about his lover's hair ("still wet from her bath"), while in "Don't Give Up on Me," a knowing bit of soul-searching, he confesses, "Lord knows there's a lot I need to change." Passages from the latter — "Got a dusty Bible on my shelf" — ring a bit too pat to be credible, and "She's Country," the album's first single, suffers from hoary allusions to a "ragin' Cajun" and a "juicy Georgia peach." For the most part, though, the writing here is so reliable, the flinty guitars and backbeats so assured, that even these lapses are easy to forgive — or program around.

Produced by Michael Knox, the son of '50s hitmaker Buddy Knox, the arrangements lean more toward twangy Southern rock than commercial country. Even ballads like "Fast" and "Big Green Tractor" pack more punch than most mainstream hits, their harmonics hinting at those of the '70s installments of the Allman Brothers and the Charlie Daniels Band.

— **Bill Friskies-Warren**

*DOWNLOAD THESE: "Wide Open," "This I Gotta See," "Fast"*