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Jason Aldean is a no bull kind of a guy



"I've always tried to be real and relatable," Jason Aldean says. "I'm kind of an everyman's guy." (Photo: Courtesy of Jim Wright)

The first thing out of Jason Aldean's mouth is an apology.

"I'm way late and I apologize," he says by phone from Tennessee, where he's in rehearsals for his They Don't Know Tour that launches Thursday and hits up a sold-out Resch Center on its first Saturday night out with Chris Young and Kane Brown.

It's a fitting start to the conversation, but not because it has anything to do with one of the biggest names in country music somehow feeling the need to apologize for a crazy schedule in the days leading up to a major tour. It's because, with Jason Aldean, he says it as he sees it — straight up and right out of the gate.

"There's not a lot of put-on with me. It's kind of like what you see is what you get," said Aldean, who already this year has racked up his 19th No. 1 hit with "Any Ol' Barstool," earned his second consecutive Academy of Country Music Award for Entertainer of the Year and turned 40.

The Georgia native told Rolling Stone last year, "It sounds awful, but I'm not a warm and fuzzy kind of guy." It's a personality trait that dovetails perfectly with his hardcore brand of rockin' country and lends itself to enticing magazine articles like "5 Things That Piss Off Jason Aldean," but it also means he's not that artist who gets up to an awards show podium and starts grinning and gushing.

"When I say I'm not warm and fuzzy I don't mean that I'm not a nice guy," he explains. "... I just think a lot of times in this business there's so many people who are so fake and try so hard to be something they're not. I'm not that guy. That's too exhausting for me. It's like what you see is what you get.

“Anybody that knows me or has taken the time to get to know me or any of that stuff, I feel pretty confident will say I’m a pretty nice guy and very loyal to people. I’m just one of those kind of guys. I will fight you over my friends and family and people that I care about. If you attack them, I’m coming at you. So I’m that guy.”

He’s also “that guy” who has become one of country’s best-selling artists both on the charts and out on the road. Since “Hicktown” and “Amarillo Sky” off his 2005 self-titled debut first signaled to country radio that he was bringing his own sound to the genre, Aldean has been unstoppable. Rowdy throwdown songs as big as the venues he plays them in, including “Johnny Cash,” “My Kinda Party” and “She’s Country,” helped ignite a young fanbase.

His seventh studio album, 2016’s “They Don’t Know,” became his his third consecutive release to bow at No. 1 on the Billboard 200. All three singles released to date have gone No. 1: “A Little More Summertime,” “Lights Come On” and “Any Ol’ Barstool.” He just announced the title track will be the next single.

If Aldean has skipped a beat in his rise to the elite ranks of artists who can sell out stadiums, it has been undetectable. He credits his gut for his ability to know a good song when he hears one. Never one to play it safe for the sake of pleasing everyone and wowing no one, he’s not afraid to cut a song he knows people might be as likely to love as they hate (see his 2011 rap-inspired megahit “Dirt Road Anthem”).

“I’m a little fearless in the sense of I don’t want to be like everyone else. I don’t want my records to sound like everybody else. I don’t want the same producer as every other act in town. I don’t want to cut the same kind of songs as they cut. I want to do my own thing and sort of separate myself from everybody else and do what I’m comfortable doing,” Aldean said. “I think that’s always kind of been a natural thing for me. Obviously, as you have success, it’s a little easier to get away with some of that stuff.”

» On the new tour: “We’re excited for the fans to see what we’ve been working on — new songs, new set, everything’s kind of brand new. It’s a new show for us, a new show for them.”

» On pacing himself during his physical live shows: “I’ve just kind of convinced myself that’s my workout for the day. I think a lot of being onstage is adrenaline, so you kind of get an adrenaline rush and you go out and you know for an hour and a half or two hours, whatever it is, you’re out there to entertain people. You want to go out there and give it everything you’ve got.

“We go out on the road and we’ll play basketball for a couple of hours a day and try to do stuff like that to kind of stay in shape so we’re not running up there out of breath. I kind of look at it as getting my cardio in for the day.”

» On playing Lambeau Field in 2015 with Kenny Chesney: “That was the first time I had a chance to play that stadium. There’s nothing like that. There’s nothing like getting a chance to play your show in a stadium, especially some of the more historic ones, and Lambeau is one of those. I think that’s one of the things for me, one of these days when it’s all said and done, to be able to look up and be able to say we played some of the coolest venues there were. I think Lambeau Field is one of those. It kind of ranks up there with me as far as Fenway Park and Wrigley Field ... You can play a hundred shows, and a stadium show, there’s just something different about it, especially at an iconic place like that.”

» On his appeal in so-called fly-over states like Wisconsin: “I think one of the things about me is I feel like I’ve always tried to be real and relatable. I’m kind of an everyman’s guy. I like to think that’s one of the reasons that things have always worked and people can feel like they can relate to what I was doing. I think it’s got a lot to do with the blue-collar stuff. That’s how I grew up.”

» On winning his second ACM Entertainer of the Year Award this month: “Waiting 11 years into my career to win the first one, that one was pretty sweet. To win it back-to-back years that was something I never even thought was possible. I feel like the older I get, the longer I’m in this business, the sweeter things like that are. I’ve been out I guess now for 12 years and the fact that we’re still around and people still care about what we’re doing and are coming to the shows and listening to the music. ... You win an award like that this far in your career, it probably means a lot more to me now than it would have had I won it a little earlier in my career. It just kind of makes you appreciate it a lot more.”

» On whether speaking his mind is a necessity in the industry or if it gets him in trouble — or both: “I think a little bit of both. I definitely have gotten myself into a couple of situations by saying what’s on my mind. On the other hand, it’s the way I’m wired. It’s just the way I am. I don’t feel like I go out and say things that are going to hurt people or whatever. If you ask me for my opinion, I’m going to give you an honest opinion. I’m not going to sit there and sugarcoat it or give a stock answer of what you think I should say. To me, again, I would think that’s something people respect. At least you know where I stand on things, whether you like my opinion or not, at least you know what it is.”

» On why loyalty means so much to him: “It’s being loyal to the people who helped me out and have been with me my whole career. My producer (Michael Knox) is the guy who brought me to Nashville almost 20 years ago. Found me in a club, brought me to Nashville and we’ve been working together ever since. My band has been with me since Day One. A lot of the people on my team, from my publicist to my management, they’ve been with me for a long, long time. Guys that work on my crew out on the road, I’ve had guys that have been with me my entire career out there. I just kind of like people that are loyal to me and look out for me, I do the same for them, and it kind of becomes a family unit. I think that’s the way it should be.”

» On if, despite all his success, he ever still feels like the underdog who has something to prove: “I think I’ll always kind of feel like the underdog, just because I originally signed to a little independent label (Broken Bow Records). I literally remember people kind of snickering at the fact that I had signed a deal with this little record company. It was kind of like they didn’t give us a chance at all for any success. Like I was almost kind of killing my career by signing there. To take that and turn it into what we have over the last decade, it’s been pretty incredible to do it. And to do it on a small label and not have the financial means that a lot of these other artists have being on these bigger labels, that’s something I’m extremely proud of. I also sort of use that as motivation. Just all those people that didn’t give us a chance it’s like, ‘Now check us out.’

“I think we’ve always kind of been the underdog. Hell, the last two years winning Entertainer of the Year ... I’ll get on there and look at these polls about people betting on who they think was going to win this award and that award, and it ain’t us. So to go in there and kind of shock people a little bit and turn some heads, I love that stuff.”