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Jason Aldean knows a hit single when he hears one

The title of Jason Aldean's new album might be "They Don't Know," but don't take that too literally. Sure, "they" might not have a clue, but when it came to his most recent No. 1 hit, the Saturday headliner at the Red, White & Boom festival absolutely understood what he had on his hands.

The song in question is a titanic-sounding blast of contemporary country gusto called "Lights Come On," a tune credited to a team of six songwriters, including Tyler Hubbard and Brian Kelley of Florida Georgia Line (which tops Sunday's Red, White & Boom roster). When the song reached Aldean's ears, "They Don't Know" was essentially complete. That's when the singer opted for overtime.

"We spent about a year working on the album and were in the studio to record the last four songs," Aldean said. "Then I got a text from B.K. from Florida Georgia Line. Those guys were writing a ton of songs but had already finished their album, too. So they sent me 'Lights Come On.' I listened to it and immediately pulled my producer out of the studio and said, 'Hey, we've got to cut

this thing today.’ So we had everybody to stay over for an extra hour to record the song. I called my manager and said, ‘I think we’ve got the first single for the album.’”

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Jason Aldean

So Aldean and his band tracked the song that afternoon. Vocals were added a few days later. Then, with Aldean returning to touring duties, his longtime producer, Michael Knox, mixed and mastered the song. “Lights Come On” was in the hands of country radio, ready for airplay, roughly two weeks later.

“It doesn’t happen that fast, typically,” Aldean said. “It’s also one of those things where you never know where a song is going to come from, so sometimes you just fly by the seat of your pants a little bit. For us, we just kind of needed a tempo. We were looking for that big sort of tempo that was in ‘She’s Country,’ ‘My Kinda Party’ and ‘Hicktown’ (singles that defined the first five years of Aldean’s hit parade of a career). We always seem to have one or two of those on each record. We had some cool things, but we didn’t have that particular type song. One time hearing ‘Lights Come On’ and I knew right away that it was going to be that song for the record that we were looking for.”

“They Don’t Know” is still a week away from release, but the album already has yielded a second single, “A Little More Summertime.” Hitch the popularity of the two singles (which are the first two songs on “They Don’t Know”) to Aldean’s reigning title as the Academy of Country Music entertainer of the year, and you have the makings of a pretty spectacular year for the Macon, Ga.-born singer.

“I think my mindset going into this record, probably, was just not wanting to get complacent, not wanting to put out things just to put them out and feel like, ‘Well, the songs are going to do OK because of the previous success we’ve had,’” Aldean said. “I don’t ever want to think like that. I want to make sure each time we go in and cut an album that we’re trying to get better. We’re trying to make a better album than we did the previous time and still sort of push the boundaries and try new things, new sounds. I feel like that’s what we’ve always done with things like ‘Dirt Road (Anthem)’ and ‘Burnin’ It Down’ (singles, ironically, that defined the most recent five years of Aldean’s career). We’ve never really been the ones that follow the pack. We’ve always kind of blazed the trail a little bit, and I never want to stop doing that.”

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With a fan base behind him strong and massive enough fill stadiums, Aldean is arguably the face of modern country music. That, however, is an accolade he is hesitant to accept.

“I don’t know, man,” Aldean said. “I don’t know how other people necessarily view me or if they think that I’m that. If they do, then that’s really cool. I’ll gladly carry that flag all day long. But I’ve just always gone out and done what came naturally for me. It’s what I enjoyed doing, what I thought was fun and what I thought represented me the best. I kind of let the rest take care of itself.

“I feel like I’ve had a good career. One of these days, when it’s all over, I can look back and realize that I was able to hang around for quite a while. Hopefully, there have been some people that have been influenced by that over the years. I think that’s one of the best compliments that you can get, having somebody else say they were influenced by you. But I don’t know. I don’t think that’s necessarily for me to say.”