

8B LIFE

USA TODAY
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2016

USA TODAY
THURSDAY, SE

MUSIC

JASON ALDEAN: NOTHING FANCY

It's 'the songs,' not the success, that matters most

Bob Doerschuk
Special for USA TODAY

The clock ticked in Nashville's Audio Productions facility, where Jason Aldean was cutting a series of video promos. He looked relaxed, laughed easily with crew members and seemed to be in no hurry at all.

Still, something was on his mind as he wrapped up the shoot and settled onto a couch inside the recording studio.

"My daughters are playing a softball game tonight," he said, referencing Keeley, 13, and Kendyl, 9. "As soon as I leave here, that's where I'm going."

Country music fans often assume their favorite superstars whisk through a daily whirl of bus tours, stadium shows and red-carpet events. But the artists themselves are often more concerned with everyday routines that anchor their lives. If, like Aldean, they've settled down, that usually means making sure to not miss after-school activities. If they're more at liberty, then partying, fishing or hitting the bars with buddies back home takes priority.

On his new album, *They Don't Know*, out Friday, Aldean, 39, goes back to that world, much as he has done on each of his albums since his self-titled debut in 2005.

Having risen from an unpromising start in Nashville to his massive and ongoing Six String



LARRY MCCORMACK, THE TENNESSEAN



JIM WRIGHT

Circus Tour, and fresh from taking home the Entertainer of the Year award at the Academy of Country Music Awards, does Aldean find it harder to draw from that reservoir of small-town values and high school crushes that feed his repertoire?

"That really isn't an issue for me," he says. "Doing things the way I do is what got me to this point. I never wanted to overthink it, change this or that. I'm simple, man! I'm not flashy. I'm not gonna come out in a bedazzling jumpsuit. What you see is what you get."

"The main thing is the songs. I like each one to get the point and



"I hate songs that get too clever and 'songwriter-y,' with all these little loops and spins. If I have to think too much about a song, it's out."

say what it says in a way that's like I was just talking. I hate songs that get too clever and 'songwriter-y,' with all these little loops and spins. If I have to think too much about a song, it's out."

Aldean's songs unfold over landscapes of place, time and memory. A photo from a long-ago spring break on *In Case You Don't Remember*, a tiny "watertown" abandoned by romance one "gray September day" on *A Little More Summertime*, a dizzy rush "down an open road ... headed toward Mexico," fueled by the promise of adventure on *The Way a Night Should Feel*.

"I will say this about love songs: I've never wanted them to get too mushy and sappy," he says. "Some guys do it great. Thomas Rhett and *Die a Happy Man*? Florida Georgia Line and *HOLY*? Yeah, man. But for me as a singer, those songs are a turnoff. On *The Way a Night Should Feel*, it's right in your face. It doesn't even have to be a trip to Mexico; maybe you took a trip with your girlfriend to Myrtle Beach. Whatever it is, you can relate to that kind of a song."

"When I hear these songs, they take me back to a point in my life. They hit a nerve with me, and I count on the fact it'll do that for somebody else, too."

BOOK BU
NEW ON
AND IN F

The boy
Rowling as
Potter, has
summer, a
on track f
Potter an
One and
No. 1 spe
weeks, 5
which v
no sign