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Photo courtesy Broken Bow Records

A native of Macon, Jason Aldean grew up a country music-loving kid with Nashville stars in his eyes. His first paying gig came at age 15 by way of a local honky-tonk, the now defunct Nashville South, where he sang in the club's house band and eventually earned enough money to buy a rusty pick-up truck. Later, he gave college baseball a try before fate landed him on Music Row, where he encountered more curveballs than any pitcher had ever thrown him. But just when striking out seemed inevitable, Aldean's single, "Hicktown," began a meteoric rise up the charts this past summer and the singer/songwriter has finally ended up scoring a homerun.

Riding on the strength of "Hicktown," Aldean's self-titled debut album sold nearly 30,000 units its first week and entered the *Billboard* Top Country Albums chart at number six. Co-written by John Rich, Big Kenny and Vicky McGehee, "Hicktown," peaked at number ten and the video climbed to number four on CMT. The album, released on country indie label Broken Bow Records, has been certified Gold and the latest single, "Why," is currently gathering steam on radio.

Aldean was initially discovered in his home state. "I was playing at a club in Atlanta, in the Marietta area," he recalls. "And the guy that later produced my record, Michael Knox, actually saw me playing in the club and signed me to a publishing deal to write songs in Nashville. And so that was pretty much my break. It was how I got to Nashville and kind of got the ball rolling, and everything went from there. It was over six years until my single came out, so it wasn't an overnight thing."

Besides having a hit record, Aldean has also stood in the circle of the Grand Ole Opry, an experience he names the highlight of his booming career so far. "I've gotten to (play the Opry) three times now," he says. "And as a country music singer, it's one of those things that you hope to get to do and now that I've done it and been asked to come back two more time, it's just cool."

Aldean hopes to model his career after previous Opry legends. "If it was up to me, I'd be one of those people like George Strait or Alabama and be around for 25 years and still be selling records and making music. Having a long career like that is my goal," he says.

— JESSICA WALDEN-GRINER