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## 'Aggressive' Aldean plays to his strengths



Broken Bow

Aldean: Has received first royalty check; working on second album.

By Brian Mansfield, Special for USA TODAY

**Aggressive behavior:** Jason Aldean, 29, has turned a style he calls "aggressive country" into a gold album and a pair of hit singles. A thumping kick drum and growling guitar riff propelled *Hicktown* into the country top 10 last fall. Aldean's current single, *Why*, turned out to be an even bigger radio favorite, reaching No. 1 on *Billboard's* country chart. "At least I'll never show up on VH1's *One Hit Wonders*, so that's good," says the Macon, Ga., native, who won new male vocalist honors at the recent Academy of Country Music awards show.

**Setting the stage:** Aldean made his public debut at age 14 at a Macon VFW hall. This year, he opened the spring leg of the Rascal Flatts tour and co-headlined the Country Gone Wild tour with Miranda Lambert. He'll play the fair-and-festival circuit throughout the summer.

**Learning how to deal:** Aldean moved to Nashville in 1998 and signed with Capitol Records not long after, but the deal went south before he ever recorded a note for the label. When Broken Bow Records offered him a contract more than three years later, Aldean had already applied for a job at a textile mill in his hometown.

Aldean admits feeling disheartened at the time that interest in his music had come only from a small independent label with a short track record. "Signing there, you don't know how it's going to go," he says. "You don't know if they're going to be around for six months or 20 years. But now that I've been there, they're obviously doing well, and I wouldn't want to be any place else." In November, Aldean's album became Broken Bow's first gold record.

**Rich gets richer:** Big & Rich's John Rich co-wrote five songs on Aldean's album, including *Hicktown* and *Why* plus two songs with Aldean himself. The five songs predate Big & Rich's first album. With a second album on the horizon, Aldean hopes he can write more with Rich, one of Nashville's hottest tunesmiths. "I talked to him a few weeks ago," Aldean says. "We're trying to get together, but it's hard. We've got some ideas we've already started working on; it's just a matter of getting in there and hammering them out." Aldean has recorded basic tracks for five new songs, with more sessions planned soon. "After you play the same songs for a year and a half, you start wanting to have some new ones to play."

**Check this out:** Aldean received his first royalty check from his record label a few months ago, meaning he has paid off the initial costs of making and marketing the album. "I'm not a millionaire, we'll put it that way, but it's good to know you don't really owe anybody any money," he says. "That's always a good feeling."