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## Jason Aldean covers new ground in life, on new LP

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Jason Aldean isn't just a country singer. He's a celebrity.

The 37-year-old learned that the difficult way, with paparazzi following him and embattled future fiancé Brittany Kerr around constantly. He initially wanted to hide from prying eyes as his personal life became public, despite enjoying the biggest successes of his career.

No more.

"I'm not going to live my life scared to come out of the house for fear of doing something stupid that somebody catches on camera," Aldean said. "I think people who've followed my career over the years know I'm not an angel."

Aldean has been openly talking to reporters about his life as he readies to release new album "Old Boots, New Dirt" on Tuesday. Sometimes subtle and surprising, the album is his most ambitious to date and could be the year's top country debut.

The album's title "Old Boots, New Dirt" is meant to symbolize this next phase in the Georgia native's life. A close listen to the album seems to reveal a narrative about a guy taking chances, moving past regret into something new and exciting, and finding love in unexpected places.

Aldean, though, cautions listeners not to read too much as subtext on the album, his sixth. He's not telling his life story, even though it may feel that way at times.

"Was there a lot going on during the recording of the album? For sure," Aldean said. "But that was sort of my escape from all that stuff. I'd like to think I separated the two as best I could."

Nevertheless there are some passionate moments of all varieties on the album, and it's in these moments Aldean takes the biggest chances — most notably with lead single "Burnin' It Down."

Aldean's always been a risk-taker, accelerating country's latest infatuation with hip-hop when he released "Dirt Road Anthem" in 2010. He had a hunch about "Burnin' It Down," an R&B love jam with looped beats and lightly processed vocals that debuted in July at No. 1 on Billboard's hot country singles chart and remains in the top spot. It appealed to Aldean for a simple reason: "It doesn't sound like every other male artist on the radio."

And that scared the bejeezus out of everyone around him.

"It's not what anybody expected, including his managers," said Clarence Spalding, Aldean's longtime manager. "That was against a lot of people, including me, going, 'I am not sure about that, Jason. I think we ought to come with something else. I think we ought to go back and record some more.' But ... he knew a lot better than we did on this one."

Fans immediately embraced it — and also gave a solid indication of how they feel about him. "Burnin' It Down" went platinum in nine weeks and is the fastest selling country digital single of 2014, helping Aldean become the country's digital certifications leader with more than 21.5 million downloads and streams.

Those around him may have thought the single a gamble. Aldean knew he was playing with house money.

"I wanted to be able to do whatever it was, whether it be a big up-tempo or a ballad or a hip-hop thing or a pop ballad," Aldean said. "We've done all that stuff and I think we've sort of put ourselves in a position where we can branch out and sorta go in a direction where people don't go and radio's going to allow us to give it a chance really. And I think that's really all you can hope for. I don't think fans are shocked when we do things like that anymore."