

(5.12.17) <http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/country/7792915/rascal-flatts-new-album-back-to-us-interview>

Rascal Flatts Discuss Why New Album 'Back To Us' Was 'One of the More Fun Projects We've Done'



Rascal Flatts will release their tenth studio album, *Back To Us*, on May 19. For a band that has been releasing music since 2000, there is a definite feeling of renewal on the album. Bassist Jay DeMarcus says that if it sounds like the band went back to the well, that was their plan.

“The album is perfectly titled because we came to the realization not too long ago that we’re okay with who we are,” he tells *Billboard*. “It’s okay to be us. People fell in love with us for a reason, and we tried to identify what those reasons were, capitalize on them, and highlight them on this record.”

Taking nothing away from their recent projects, lead singer Gary LeVox adds that the band definitely was living in the moment while recording the new project. “We had such an amazing time making the record. It was so fun, and the atmosphere was so fun. We were cutting songs that we were in love with, so the energy level was high. I think you can feel it on every single track on this album.”

The set is led by the lead-off single “Yours If You Want It,” which currently sits at no. 20 on the Hot Country Songs chart. One cut from the new album that will definitely be a fan favorite during their stage show, though, is “Our Night To Town,” which LeVox says is a very special song.

“It’s high energy and so amazing. Chris DeStefano, Travis Hill, and I wrote that song for the Tim Tebow Foundation. He’s got a big thing called ‘Night To Shine,’ which is a prom for special needs kids all across the world. All fifty states and eleven countries this year did a prom. All the kids are crowned king or queen of the prom. Tim’s message is ‘That’s how God looks at you every day.’ That was the inspiration and the reason that we wrote that one. We had the special needs kids from the Kennedy Center here in Nashville come in and sing the end of it with us, so it was a magical moment. We’re definitely proud of that little piece of humanity on the album. It was a lot of fun.”

Two decades into playing music together, that time on stage is still as fun as ever, notes Rooney. “We love to play live. We’re road dogs. We grew up playing music them in Ohio, and myself in Oklahoma to live this crazy dream. I think that we practically live on the road, but with the family life, I think there’s a beautiful balance of being able to tour -- and then come back home.”

The road has been where the band has done some of their most inspiring work over the years, according to many of today’s biggest stars, such as Kelsea Ballerini and Chris Lane. When told of their fellow artists’ comments about the learning experience, DeMarcus says it feels good -- but they just have tried to pay forward the examples shown to them by artists such as Kenny Chesney and Brooks & Dunn.

“Anytime you hear that, it’s very special and very humbling. I don’t think there was any better training ground for us than playing at the Fiddle and Steel in Printer’s Alley as many nights as we did,” he insists. “That’s where we found our footing, honed our craft, and really learned to be entertainers. There’s so much more to it than just standing up there and delivering the songs. I think that anybody can go home, put the record on, and listen to it note for note, but there’s very little entertainment value in that, I believe. When you give people something visually entertaining to watch along with presenting the music, I feel it makes it a lot more interesting. I love every aspect of live performance and putting our shows together, and approaching it from the standpoint of ‘What would we want to see if we were a fan sitting in the audience?’” There is definitely somewhat of an artist perspective on *Back To Us*, with song contributions from fellow performers such as Chris Stapleton, Dan + Shay, and Jennifer Hanson. “You’ve got Dan + Shay, who are having so much success, and Chris Stapleton is one of the biggest things in the world right now. But that energy we feel comes from all of that other energy,” says Rooney. “These people are really creative souls who put their hearts out there. They gave us some of our best. We’re just blessed to have these kinds of songs pitched to us. We’re thankful so much that they are open to pitch their songs to us. Dan + Shay could have easily recorded the songs themselves that made this album, and probably should have.”

Just as with their 2016 holiday release *The Greatest Gift Of All*, the band shares a production credit, but DeMarcus’s name is also listed separately -- except one one bonus cut, which was produced by busbee. Rooney says that is no coincidence.

“You’re not going to find anybody any more passionate than Jay DeMarcus. For him to take the reins of the wheel is a good thing, because that energy is all over the record. I think that was why this is one of the more fun projects we’ve done, even though we took our time with it -- about fifteen months in all, it also feels like it has went by faster than any project we have done. There was zero anxiety, and each song just kept building and building into the album, and it really feels great.”

The band collectively penned “Are You Happy Now” with Sean McConnell, and were joined in the studio by Lauren Alaina on the cut. DeMarcus said they knew what she could do vocally, but she was even more impressive. “She did so fantastic. It’s so difficult to find someone who can go toe to toe with Gary in the studio, and she was phenomenal. She got in there, hunkered down for about two hours, and knocked it all of the ballpark. She’s so delightful to work for. It was awesome.”

As the band continues to plow ahead musically, what are the biggest differences that they have seen since “Prayin’ For Daylight” launched their career in 2000? Rooney says that the change in recorded formats is one he points to. “I think the way that music is sent out to fans has changed so much. We were one of the groups out today that came out before iTunes. We got to see what it was like to go through the period to get to where we are now. You can get music to people so quick now, it’s crazy.”

As for DeMarcus, he feels the business model for breaking an artist now is vastly different than when they signed with Lyric Street. “I think the 360 deals are what stands out to me, first and foremost. I never would have dreamed that record labels would be taking a piece of touring, merchandise, and everything else. The world has changed so dramatically from when we first started. I would not want to be a new artist starting out today for anything in the world. It is what it is, and it’s the world we live in, but we got in at the very end of the golden age of record deals.”

Back To Us will be released May 19 on Big Machine.