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TUCKER BEATHARD: *HELL-BENT* AND ON THE RISE



Hours before taking the Kimmel stage for his first time ever, Tucker Beathard, who inked a deal with Big Machine before releasing his debut EP in October, was somehow wrangled and herded to the HITS offices, where he met up with Samantha Hissong for a quick pre-performance interview. At that time, Beathard—the son of revered songwriter Casey Beathard (Eric Church, Kenny Chesney)—was also preparing to head out on tour with Brantley Gilbert. At press time, he’s still on the road for the Devil Don’t Sleep Tour, which wraps at the end of April, and his second single, “Momma and Jesus” is bubbling just under at Country radio, preparing to chart; premier single “Rock On,” which has already racked up more than 18m Spotify streams, went #2 at the format last fall.

So, what do naked rides on pedal taverns, production elements reminiscent of Kings of Leon, Tom DeLonge-style guitar playing, Nashville and Jackass have in common? Mothertuckers (the endearing name for Beathard fans) know the answer.

INTERVIEW BY SAMANTHA HISSONG

Talk to me about picking the songs for *Fight Like Hell*. Was it hard for you to pick the first that you were gonna share with the world? What did you want people to take away from your debut EP? It was really tough. Over the past four or five years, I accumulated so many songs. Trying to narrow it down to six to be represented by was definitely a challenge, but I didn’t have to do it all by myself. There were other people who chimed in and stuff like that. I think, overall, it covers a good kind of timeline of all my years of writing. And there’s a little something of each side of me as an artist in

the six songs. It's a whole lot better than one song; that's for sure. It took a lot of planning and whatnot but I feel good about it.

And how's the reception been? Is it super surreal? You finally have your first taste of music out to the public, and "Rock On" went #2 at Country radio.

It's awesome. It's fun to make a little bit of noise and then almost add on to the dam until you can finally show people a little bit of what you're about. So, I think there were quite a few people who were eager and waiting to hear some more stuff, and when I got to put that out, it seemed like it got great responses.

When we first met you were on tour with Dierks [Bentley]. Let's talk about that experience.

That was really fun. Really fun...

There's a great smirk behind that.

Yea... There were a lot of good times [laughs]. But, the people on that tour, like Cam and Randy [Houser]... and Dierks, obviously... they're such great people. And they've got great teams. It was really cool learning a lot from them and kind of getting a first taste of the next level and stuff like that. We were all really fired up to be out there, and I'm kinda like the little brother to everybody, ya know, so it was fun.

What was the most memorable moment from the tour?

Couldn't beat Red Rocks. Playing there for the first time. I think that's on any artist's bucket list.

That one definitely stands out.

And you're going on tour with Brantley [Gilbert] in a few days. You toured a solid amount in 2016.

With that experience under your belt, do you hope to do anything differently on this next tour?

Yea. On the Dierks tour, I was the first of like four artists playing. So, I'd kinda just go out and make noise and let the other ones take over from there, but now, as the main support, I feel like there are bigger shoes to fill and a bigger role to play. I wanna really get 'em fired up and put on a good show before the main event, so there's definitely a little more thought and planning going into it. Overall, I'll just be trying to make enough noise to get everybody fired up for Brantley.

You played the Opry this month. How was that?

That was the first time I had ever gotten nervous before playing a show.

Really? You don't normally get nervous before a show?

No, I don't, but I was nervous, man. I mean, I'll probably be nervous tonight.

Well, those are valid things to be nervous for—playing the Opry and your debut TV appearance.

Yea, but it was awesome; it was a really cool experience... to be a part of that long list of legends that have played there. It's just unforgettable, really.

By the way, I wanna know if you're planning on officially releasing "Whiskey in a Wine Glass"?

When I saw you play, that seemed to be a real crowd pleaser, but it wasn't on the EP.

Yea, that was one that I thought should be on the EP, but the label didn't want it on the EP. I don't know. Whether I like it or not, it's gotta be on the album, because a lot of the crowds respond so well to that one. So, I think it's earned its spot for sure.

When I first heard you, I was on the other end of the grounds [at Irvine Meadows Amphitheatre], and I remember thinking, "Woah, this is really cool. This isn't just country; it's rougher and rockier,"

and I thought it had this Kings of Leon kind of vibe to it to an extent. And then I found out that [frequent KOL collaborator] Angelo Petraglia was involved in the production. Did you know that you wanted to work with him from the get-go?

Yea, I think, more than anything, I always gravitated towards and loved that kind of music and the work that he's done in the past. I'd be lying if I said that some of that sound came from me working with him; if anything, it came from me looking up to what he did before I knew him. So, when they talked about Angelo, I knew for sure that I would be cool with him. And, honestly, I couldn't think of a better person to take it on or a better person to work with, because we've got such similar tastes. I'm just a huge fan of his work, so I felt really good about using him, and I was right; he's a great guy to work with.

You definitely have that rocky sound. Who are some of your favorite guitarists?

I'd have to say that my all-time favorite, even though he's not one of those "typical" shredding guitarists, would be Tom DeLonge, who was of course in blink-182. Definitely the most influential too. I've learned a lot from his style, and I guess I kind of taught myself by looking up to him.

I wouldn't have expected that.

I know.

What about your favorite guitar to play?

I have a tough time getting over how much I love Gibson 335s and how good they are.

It's obviously fair to say that music's in your blood. What was it like growing up with music all around you?

It was awesome. It was a great environment to be around. I just loved it. I loved anything that had to do with music. I guess when you're young and you get bitten by the music bug or whatever you want to call it, that's all you want to do with your life—just surround yourself with it. I was fortunate to grow up around it, and that gave me enough of a taste so that after high school, I just wanted to 100%, full-time do it. And that's what I did.

I know that you and your dad both have writing credits on "Rock On." Did he help you with the whole EP?

Nah, "Rock On" was just one that we wrote together, but we write a lot of songs together.

What's it like working with your dad?

I love it. I never thought I would, because we always used to butt heads. I couldn't have imagined it before, but when it comes to that and being creative like that, we think a lot alike and work great together.

What's one of the most important things he's taught you about working in music?

Really just stay true to yourself and write from the heart. It's tough, but stick to your guns, write what you believe in and sell it.

Would you say that songwriting comes naturally to you?

Yea, definitely. It wasn't something that I wanted to try to do. It was something that kind of found me. It was like my therapy. Honestly, I didn't know how to express anything or really talk or anything like that, so I just started writing songs, and it felt so good. I didn't really have any aspirations of doing anything with my songwriting, other than saving myself with it. Then I found

out how good it felt to sing them and play them for people on stage, and I just fell in love and didn't want to do anything else.

So, when you started dabbling in songwriting before you were performing, did you consider just doing songwriting or did you always see yourself as a performer?

I guess I did always want to be on stage, but in the beginning, I always thought that I'd just be a drummer; that was my first instrument. But then I started getting better at guitar and singing and writing, and it got to the point where I just wanted to be up front.

You're about to do your debut, national TV appearance on Kimmel. Thoughts going into that?

I don't really know what to expect, because it's nothing like anything I've ever done before. I'm really excited... and a little nervous for sure, but I don't know if it's really hit me yet. When it starts getting closer to that time, I'm probably either gonna be super excited or super freaked out. I can't tell.

Lastly, you have to talk about the "Momma and Jesus" music video because it's just so fuckin' crazy and great.

I always loved Jackass growing up, and me, my brothers and friends would always make stupid videos of us doing stunts and whatnot. I started showing my manager the videos just for fun, saying things like, "Hey, check this out. Check out what I did once. Got some footage of this and that." Then, we were like, "Shoot... we should just make the whole video like this. Just doing stunts." So, we thought of a bunch of stunts and actually performed them and got them on film and made a music video.

So, you actually did the stunts?

Oh, yea.

Any injuries sustained?

Nope. Got some scars, but that's it. The stunt guy that they thought we were gonna use on some of those actually got so frustrated with me and my friends that he quit and walked off, because we were like, "We're not using you, dude."

And I heard the police even got involved slightly.

Me and a couple of my friends took one of 'em a little too far. We took off on a pedal tavern and we were...

Naked.

Pretty much naked, yea [laughs]. We just started running. We didn't have our phones and we didn't know our way around. We were just like walking and running around all of downtown Nashville, and we were in this alley when we saw this cop. We were like, "Oh, crap! There's a cop." He drove by and then he pulled back and turned his lights on, so we were like, "Oh, shit!" and started running again.

I think that's a good note to end on.

Good with me.