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Eli Young Band & Tucker Beathard Perform in Bahamas for 'Stories Behind the Songs' Series

While much of the U.S. was battling freezing winter weather over the weekend, the Eli Young Band and country newcomer Tucker Beathard were enjoying the Bahamas. The two acts performed at the Sandals Royal Bahamian Spa Resort in Nassau as part of the Stories Behind the Songs series on Friday (Dec. 9), which launched in September. CMT's Cody Alan hosted the show at the Royal Theater, which was attended by key radio programmers and contest winners as well as Sandals guests.

"This is a neat deal to be able to sit up there and play acoustic and play these songs in a different environment. But they had to twist our arms to come play the Bahamas in December," lead vocalist Mike Eli told Billboard wearing a big grin.

In an extremely apropos setting, the Eli Young Band performed their new single "Saltwater Gospel." "We fell in love with 'Saltwater Gospel.' It captures a feeling that's almost indescribable. It was a no-brainer for all four of us," Eli says of the consensus shared by EYB guitarist James Young, drummer Chris Thompson and bassist Jon Jones.

Young concurs. "Sometimes you get those songs you hear at first listen and it's 'Yes!' when all four of us agree. That was undeniable. It reminds me of when we heard 'Crazy Girl.' Thirty seconds in and we knew it was a great song," says Young, referencing 'Crazy Girl,' which was Billboard's 2011 Country Song of the Year.

Young says the band has always wanted to do a beach song and "Saltwater Gospel" came from a unique perspective that was appealing. "It puts a different spin on it, more about feeling humble in nature," Young shares. "You can find spirituality in everything in nature. We fell in love with the sentiment."

The band recently finished recording their new album for the Valory Music Co. Produced by Ross Copperman and Jeremy Stover, the release is due sometime next year. "I feel like we came full circle with this record," Eli says, noting that the band wrote all but three songs on the new set. "We went back to a lot of sounds that worked so well for us on some of our earlier records and really focused on that."

As the touring year winds down, the band was happy to play a gig that focused specifically on songs and songwriting. "It opens up the freedom to get a little deeper into explaining the songs and talking about where they came from, what inspired them and how they relate to us," says Thompson. "If you do that in your regular, big loud show, it changes things. It definitely changes the dynamic. This is definitely the right place and right time to get into it and the audience is expecting that."

Jones says vacationing audiences, in general, are a different crowd. "When you play a show in someone's hometown, they are only 20 minutes removed from their regular life," Jones says. "So it's still in the back of their head what they have to go home to, what they are doing the next day, whatever that might be. But when you're out here, people are in a different mindset. They are ready to have fun. They can put all their worries behind them and just enjoy the night."

Beathard was excited about opening for the Eli Young Band, especially in the tropical setting. "I couldn't ask for a better way to end the year," says Beathard, a Big Machine Label Group newcomer whose Friday night set included his debut hit, "Rock On," and new single "Momma and Jesus." "I've been wanting to come to the Bahamas for a while. I've never been but I've seen pictures. I looked forward to coming. I brought a couple friends with me and we've been enjoying the resort and soaking it up."

Beathard admits since the show was at an all-inclusive resort he thought it might be difficult to get the audience to listen. "They are on vacation with a free bar, I thought it would be tough to get their attention, but they were a good group," he says. "It's tough to beat having a full band and be rockin' out, but I do love the stripped down acoustic songwriter stuff too. Both are fun."

Beathard is the son of hit Nashville songwriter Casey Beathard, whose cuts include Kenny Chesney's "Don't Blink" and Eric Church's "Homeboy." The younger Beathard's debut EP, *Fight Like Hell*, came out this fall and he hit the road after that, headlining his *Rock On College Tour* with special guest Aubrie

Sellers. Beathard co-wrote all six songs on his debut EP including "Momma and Jesus." "It talks about thanking God that Momma and Jesus haven't given up on me because I don't know where I'd be if they did," he says. "It's a pretty relatable thing. Everybody has done things in their life, stupid stuff, but two people have your back. It's really cool to see people connect with a song like that. I get messages on social media. To write a song and have it impact somebody's life is really cool. It's the whole reason I love music and do it."

Though the Sandals visit was a first for Beathard, the Eli Young Band have been Sandals Resort guests before. "I actually got married at Sandals in Jamaica," says Jones. "I drug these guys out and they stood up for me at my wedding six years ago. Sandals does a good job of showcasing acts like us, but also taking care of the communities, which is very important. They do a lot of good charity work."

"Sandals Resorts Foundation brought some kids in that sang one of our songs to us, which was incredible," Eli says, noting it was one of the highlights of their weekend. "They are doing a lot of work with families that were hit by the last hurricane."

The Resort held a toy drive during the event. Media and radio guests were encouraged to bring gifts for Bahamian children affected by the most recent hurricane. "They also do a lot with building schools and libraries and restoring the beaches," says Jones. "They do a lot for the islands."

The Eli Young Band/Tucker Beathard show was the second in the Stories Behind the Songs series. Radio stations from around the country broadcast live from the event during the weekend. "We want to keep things interesting and exciting for our guests," says Sandals rep Lazar DeLorenzo Charlton. "It's really cool to get country music down here in the Bahamas. A lot of our guests enjoy country music."

The first Stories Behind the Songs event was held in Turks and Caicos Sept. 23-26 featuring Lee Brice, Jerrod Niemann and Dylan Scott. "The Story Behind the Songs concert series has not only been hugely successful but also served as a platform for a major initiative we're rolling out at our resorts across the Caribbean called LIV + Events," says Debbie-Ann White, senior vp of public relations and promotions for Unique Vacations Inc.

Though details are still in the works, Sandals plans to initiate other events next year. "Based on the results we've seen from our first two Story Behind the Songs LIV+ vacation packages, there's definitely a demand for more events like these," White says. "The feedback has been tremendous and we're busy planning a number of exclusive experiences for 2017."