

transitioned from Mort, the Prierman family patriarch. He says

you still love me if I change — gender, education, religion, you

to rejuvenate the fictional New

request, Harris begins a quest to

“Within his world, he is considered a good man.”

MUSIC

Country, funk tangle on Thomas Rhett's latest

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When country singer Thomas Rhett saw the middle-aged white guys wearing their cowboy hats, tucked-in shirts and belt buckles dancing as his band played *Up-town Funk*, he knew he'd found his direction.

“When you see 25,000 people with their hands in the air going crazy, you're like, ‘Shoot, maybe we can record songs that can sound like that,’” he says.

His album *Tangled Up*, out Sept. 25, is a country-funk hybrid that owes to the Mark Ronson and Bruno Mars hit. “It definitely determined the way we wanted the record to flow,” he says.



RICK DIAMOND, GETTY IMAGES, FOR KICKER COUNTRY

Thomas Rhett's *Tangled Up* mixes in funk and R&B.

Tangled Up's lead single, *Crash and Burn*, is looking like a career-changing hit. Released in April, it has sold 472,000 copies, according to Nielsen Music, and sits at No. 9 on USA TODAY's Country airplay chart. With its whistling hook and a rhythm track de-

signed to recall R&B singer Sam Cooke's 1960 single *Chain Gang*, *Crash and Burn* sounds like nothing else on country radio.

Crash and Burn sounded so different that Thomas Rhett, the son of artist and songwriter Rhett Akins, says he and others on his team were terrified by the risk involved in releasing it. “It could epically fail, or it could go all the way to the top and set you apart from the pack,” he says.

Since his first album two years ago, Thomas Rhett, 25, has had a trio of No. 1 country singles: *It Goes Like This*, *Get Me Some of That* and *Make Me Wanna*. He has co-written others' hits, including Florida Georgia Line's *Round Here*.

With his new album, he says, “I wanted to sing songs I felt like

only I could pull off.”

Tangled Up has funk and R&B elements throughout. *Vacation* is a party tune built off the bass riff from War's 1975 hit *Low Rider*.

Thomas Rhett and his co-writers realized the resemblance after recording the song. “We were like, ‘This definitely sounds like *Low Rider*,’” he says. So they decided to cut the song's writers in on the new songwriting credits.

Tangled Up also includes a duet with Jordin Sparks: *Playing With Fire*. Big Machine Records head Scott Borchetta, who met Sparks in his role as mentor on *American Idol*, approached her team. “Within 24 hours, they ... booked a flight to Nashville for her,” Thomas Rhett says.

John Marks, SiriusXM's senior director of country programming

THE TRACK LIST FOR 'TANGLED UP'

- ▶ Anthem
- ▶ Crash and Burn
- ▶ South Side
- ▶ Die a Happy Man
- ▶ Vacation
- ▶ Like It's the Last Time
- ▶ T-Shirt
- ▶ Single Girl
- ▶ The Day You Stop Lookin' Back
- ▶ Tangled
- ▶ Playing With Fire (feat. Jordin Sparks)
- ▶ I Feel Good (feat. LunchMoney Lewis)
- ▶ Learned It From the Radio

calls *Tangled Up* “sonically courageous,” adding that it “will add jet propellant to an already heating-up career.”