

## Thomas Rhett shakes it up on 2nd album

Country singer's sophomore disc, 'Tangled Up,' has a retro, funky R&B vibe



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Nashville singer/songwriter Thomas Rhett has been relishing the calm before the publicity storm that will accompany the release of his sophomore album on Friday, “Tangled Up.”

The 13-track album — which kicked off this summer with the No. 1 single “Crash and Burn” — will be introduced with a monthlong publicity jag that begins Wednesday with an attempt at the world’s largest game of Twister (“tangled up,” get it?) at the AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas. He’ll also hit the road for a tour with Florida Georgia Line that arrives Oct. 3 at Chula Vista’s Sleep Train Amphitheatre.

Rhett — the 25-year-old son of famed Nashville songwriter Rhett Atkins — exploded onto the music scene in 2012 with his multiplatinum album “It Goes Like This,” which produced five singles, including the title song, “Make Me Wanna” and “Get Me Some of That.” The Country Music Association’s “New Artist of the Year” nominee talked about his fast-rising career, his surprisingly funky second album and his blissful marriage in a phone interview from Nashville last week.

Q: What’s it like getting ready for the album launch?

A: Life is crazy right now. I guess starting next week my life kind of just gets pretty chaotic for a month. I’m going and visiting all the late night TV I can and “Good Morning America,” “Dancing with the Stars” and “Ellen.” It’s fun, the attention that “Crash and

Burn” has gotten and we’ll be traveling around trying to bring some attention to the record.

Q: Speaking of promotion, you’re pretty active and open on Twitter, sharing your personal thoughts and photos and videos of you and your wife, Lauren. Do you ever feel like you share too much or want to shield some of your personal lives?

A: I think you have to make a choice when you’re marketing because you are the product. I’m putting the record out there and whether it’s loved or hated, I can’t take anything personal. At some point, you want to bombard them with new information. We like to have fun and let them know what we’re doing on the road. It is fun, but it can be all-consuming. You have to get to a space where you’re throwing yourself out there, letting them into your life and marriage, your dogs and your music. So many fans appreciate that. There are fans who are inappropriate at times and when people say something about my wife, it can get a little intense. For now, we love it. I don’t know if we’ll still love it two years from now.

Q: “Tangled Up” is really a surprise. You talk about being influenced by James Brown and Usher and many of the songs have a strong retro funk, soul and R&B vibe that’s really outside of the box for a country artist. Country fans aren’t always forgiving with that kind of crossover. Are you nervous about what fans will think?

A: Everyone that you remember from 10 years ago who is now a superstar did something in their careers that they got destroyed for. I think to anybody that says it’s not country, I’ll ask them what is your definition of country? If Merle Haggard is your definition of country, then this is not for you. The genre evolves every 10 years. For me, it sucks to be told someone doesn’t like something, but at the end of the day, you have a ton of people who love what you do. Music is like a restaurant. Not everyone loves Chick-fil-A, but some people do like Chick-fil-A.

Q: Do you have a favorite single on the new album?

A: We’ve been playing “T-Shirt” the last couple weeks and it’s been great. I really love “Die a Happy Man.” I’ve never put a serious love song on a record before to let people know about how I feel about my wife and marriage. It’s about reminding people that marriage is actually cool sometimes, especially at a time where a lot of splits are going on. I get chills when I hear “Playing with Fire.” And I love the more wacky ones like “Tangled Up” and “Vacation.” It’s a fun album.

Q: How did growing up the son of a famous songwriter influence your writing and career?

A: I think I learned from him how to take “no” not as a failure but as a “try harder.” He was an artist who didn’t go as far as he wanted to go (as a singer) so he became the best songwriter that’s doing it right now. There are 15 to 20 people in Nashville who are killing it right now and he’s one of them. I also learned from him you have to write 10 songs to get a good one, so you just learn to push yourself to be creative.

Q: By that measure, does that mean there are dozens of songs that didn’t make the cut for “Tangled Up”?

A: You ought to hear the 70 songs we had to weed through to get the 13 we chose. It's tough. If you were to pick 10 random country fans and ask them to listen to 70 songs and pick their favorites, they'd all have different ones in mind. I just go with my gut.

Q: You seem to be at a very good place in your life and career right now.

A: I've never been happier in my whole life. The shows are getting bigger, louder and funner. Everything is working and the stars are aligning. I'm pumped that my label gave me the freedom to make an album like this. Some labels wouldn't, so I'm very blessed.