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Thomas Rhett on His Musical Evolution: 'Who I Was & Who I Am Began to Shift Along the Way'

By Chuck Dauphin [Twitter](#) | September 24, 2015 9:12 PM EDT



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If you notice a stylistic difference between Thomas Rhett's 2013 debut *It Goes Like This* and his sophomore album *Tangled Up*, you're not mistaken.

"There are a lot of artists today that I think are starting their own grassroots following and getting a lot of fans via Twitter or Instagram, then trying to go find a record deal to work their records. I was writing songs, getting a few cuts here and there, and got my record deal with literally about 10 fans," he recalls, saying that he was finding his artistic way throughout the making of his debut. "I really didn't know where to start, so when I was making my first record, and then doing shows, who I was and who I am began to shift along the way. I think the first record was a mixture -- people I thought I was, and certain things like that are still who I am today."

His first few singles were very much in the "Bro-Country" style, but for the final single, the Valory Music Co. decided to roll the dice on the R&B-tinged "Makes Me Wanna," which pleasantly surprised the singer. "I never in a million years thought that would be the single. But putting that out and seeing how well it did on radio as well as live just kind of fueled the fire for me to cut songs like 'Crash and Burn,'" he says, referring to the first single from *Tangled Up*, which arrives Friday. "If that hadn't done as well at radio as it has, I don't think I would have cut a lot of the songs I did for the album," he admits. "That gave me the confidence to fully roll with where I wanted to head musically. It's a huge departure, but for me, it's not really. I feel like these certain songs have been in my head for so long that it wasn't as much of a shift."

The success of "Makes Me Wanna" really seemed to be a lift for the singer -- as well as

a sign that it was ok for him to stretch his artistic wings a bit, with Tangled Up featuring more than its' share of pop and R&B grooves, such as "Anthem" and "South Side."

"It was so freeing. At that point, I thought, 'Now I can go make the entire full record that I want to make.' The success of that record showed me that my fans were willing to go there with me. I wrote it when I was 19 years old, so obviously those kinds of songs had been part of me since I was a young kid. When I put it out, I felt like I was 100 percent fully being me, and being able to move, and to dance, and to sing funky songs like that. Now, that 'Crash' is doing so well, it's fun to know that sometimes when you trust your gut, it pans out for you every now and then."

This fall, Rhett will hit the road as part of the CMT on Tour series with Brett Eldredge, with whom he says he has a personal and musical kinship. "I love the fact that we're touring together, and both of us are trying to step outside of that box a little bit. I think it will make for a really cool headlining experience, especially for the fans. It will be fun to get out there and sing songs with each other that you never would imagine that he and I would sing together. He's also become a good friend of mine, so it's gonna be fun. It will be our first serious headlining tour to this point."

The two also collaborated on a new commercial for Zaxby's, a restaurant chain that he says is close to his heart. "I called Brett the other day, and told him 'I don't know if you realize this, but you have made my dreams come true.' He grew up in Illinois, and I was born in Georgia, but grew up in Nashville, but the first Zaxby's ever was planted about twenty miles from my hometown. I'll never forget going there for the first time when I was about eight or nine years old. For me, I would rather go to there than a nice steakhouse. So, to be involved in a Zaxby's commercial was the coolest thing in the world to me. We have such good chemistry on camera together, so we made a fun day out of it."

