

Rolling Stone

Watch Thomas Rhett Perform Love Letter to His Wife 'Die a Happy Man'

Earthy single balances out the soul and pop of Rhett's new album 'Tangled Up'

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With today's release of *Tangled Up*, Thomas Rhett claims a sizzling fusion of soul, funk, R&B and country as his own. In an interview with *Rolling Stone Country*, the "Crash and Burn" hitmaker says he feels reinvented with a bold new calling card, but he's not looking to leave the past behind just yet.

Country music — and acoustic music in general — remains a primary influence, as shown in this stripped-down performance of his new single, "Die a Happy Man," played during a backstage session at the Grand Ole Opry. He wrote the heartfelt song for his wife Lauren, who had asked him to whip up something along the lines of Tim McGraw's "Just to See You Smile."

Lusty rockers like "It Goes Like This" and "Get Me Some of That" will always be in the mix, too, but Rhett says the sounds of Motown, Memphis and Muscle Shoals that dominate the album were just too much fun to be left languishing on some oldies station. Almost all of *Tangled Up*'s 13 tracks, seven of which were co-written by the singer, embrace choice ingredients of those styles.

"You can't deny that the whole [Sixties and Seventies] era of funk and pop and R&B just made everybody feel good," he insists. "I mean, you watch old movies and hear their soundtracks and it's just like, 'Man, that feels amazing.'"

Up until the creation of *Tangled Up*, Rhett always felt like he hadn't quite found his niche. That's partially why his first album, *It Goes Like This*, sounded so diverse.

"I feel like my whole approach into the business was a little bit off-kilter," he says. "Making my first record was a complete shot in the dark. . . If you listen to that whole first record, it was literally produced by six different people because we just kept searching and searching [for a signature sound]. So I think on the first record, there was about half of it that was so old to me that I didn't even fully remember who that TR was, and the other half was kind of the 'new' me. There were just a lot of different Thomas Rhett's on that first one."

But then something changed. First dipping his toe into R&B with the swaying "Make Me Wanna" — the final single off his last album, as well as his third consecutive Number One — Rhett then doubled down with the whistling funk of "Crash and Burn." Written by Chris Stapleton and Jesse Frasure, the song became Tangled Up's debut single, not to mention another chart-topping hit. Rhett had found his mark, a distinct identity that may rub a few traditional fans the wrong way, but won't suffer from apathy.

Produced by Frasure and Dann Huff, Tangled Up mixes the classic vibes of a throwback record with the range and excitement of new-school arrangements. There's a hint of Southern traditionalism thrown into the mix too, and the result is the signature sound Rhett was looking for all along.

"There were definitely a lot of songs that were me pushing — trying to be progressive — and the production on certain songs is so much farther advanced than the majority of the first album," he admits. "We did take a lot of chances and risk, but there's also that same TR that you knew from Record One. I guess there are still a lot of different things that I do, and I think it's cool that they all kind of cohesively sound like me."

