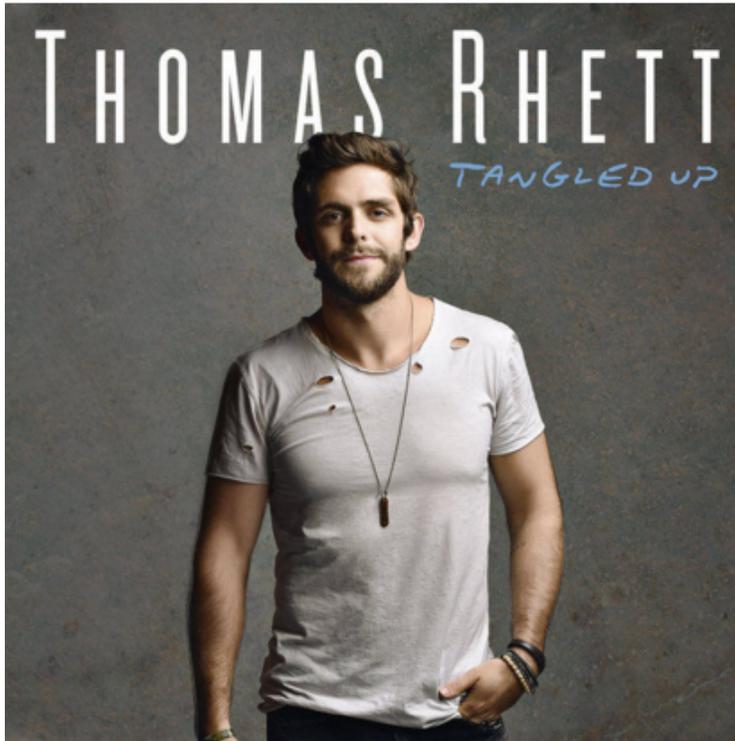


Thomas Rhett delivers a 'Tangled Up' collection of 'country' tunes (CD review)



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CLEVELAND, Ohio – With the notable exception of Hank Williams Jr., the likelihood of topping – or even matching – your Old Man's success in country music is about on a par with getting Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton to slow dance.

Thomas Rhett Akins Jr. could be that exception.

His dad had a modicum of success as a solo artist in the mid-'90s, but is really known as one of Nashville's better songwriters. Senior is the pen behind his own "That Ain't My Truck"; "All Over Me" by Josh Turner; "Gimmie That Girl" by Joe Nichols; "Put A Girl In It" by Brooks & Dunn; "I Don't What This Night To End" by Luke Bryan; and "Boys Round Here" by Blake Shelton.

Junior – who goes by the stage name of Thomas Rhett – definitely inherited his father's songwriting genes, which shows in his sophomore release, "Tangled Up." But it's tough to call his music country.

Sure, there is the requisite drawl on some of the tunes like "Crash and Burn" and the touching best tune on the album, an homage to his wife called "Die a Happy Man."

But my biggest issue with the album is what Rhett, who is nominated for best new artist

in this year's Country Music Awards, is celebrating: the incongruity of the music. Written while he was on tour to support his debut album, "It Goes Like This," Rhett describes the CD as an homage to the varied music to which he listened as a kid.

Varied, as in pop, rock, funk, dance, electronica, hip-hop and, I guess somewhere in there, a little country. The title cut is a bit like Bruno Mars jamming with Justin Timberlake, with a helping of Daft Punk. And "I Feel Good" would be at home on a LunchMoney Lewis album ... which makes sense, because the rapper is the guest vocalist on it.

I've got nothing against any of those artists. Mars and Timberlake put on a pair of shows that I will remember for a long time, and Lewis has a bit of his own lineage – his dad, Ian, and uncle, Roger, are in the reggae group Inner Circle – and co-wrote "Bo\$\$\$" for the pop vocal group Fifth Harmony.

I get that mainstream country is changing, and it ain't crying pedal steel guitars, sideburns and gals with bouffants anymore. All the king's hosses, etc.

But when George Strait can put out a stone country album like "Cold Beer Conversation" and that "whippersnapper" Garth Brooks can deliver a better show than any other artist in the field and Toby Keith shows off an amazing softer side with a release like "35 mph Town," it's a sign that these young guns need to do some listenin'.

Or I need to learn that these kids are gonna be all over my lawn and no amount of yellin' from my front porch is gonna keep 'em off.